

ENCOUNTERING JESUS  
TODAY & THE  
DIFFERENCE HE MAKES

**?** BIGGER  
QUESTIONS

*news*

**GOOD NEWS**  
ENCOUNTERING JESUS TODAY  
AND THE DIFFERENCE HE MAKES



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WE LOVE **GOOD NEWS**.  
NEWS OF A NEW COFFEE  
PLACE, A NEW BURGER  
BAR, A NEW DEAL TO  
SAVE US MONEY.

THE GOSPEL OF MARK  
(ONE OF THE FOUR  
BIOGRAPHIES OF JESUS)  
BEGINS BY CLAIMING  
THAT IT OFFERS **GOOD  
NEWS**. HOW CAN THE  
BIBLE BE GOOD NEWS  
TODAY?

*"As an entrepreneur, what drives you has to be the good news;  
otherwise, you just don't get out of bed."*

*- Natalie Massenet*

*"If you don't change your beliefs, your life will be like this forever. Is that good news?"*

*-W. Somerset Maugham*

Have you heard any good news lately? We love good news. News of a new job, a new opportunity, a new relationship, coffee place, a new burger bar, a new deal to save money. The world seems to be full of bad news, we enjoy something good, something that inspires us, lifts us up and makes us smile or feel satisfied.

As we encounter Jesus in this reading guide, we'll meet a number of people for whom an encounter with Jesus has been life-changing. We'll explore for ourselves how the person of Jesus brings good news and we can work out whether this 'good news' will work for us.

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way” –

“a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.’”

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

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. John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

What is a Messiah? Messiah is 'special king' promised long ago. The Messiah is a little like Neo from the Matrix, Anakin Skywalker from Star Wars, Kung Fu Panda or the Special from the Lego film – the one who would come to bring truth and justice. How is the historical Jesus being the Messiah specifically good news for us? Well, we'll need to keep reading to find out.

What is the good news spoken of here? It's about Jesus and his declaration as Messiah.

Here Mark has collected two prophecies about a 'messenger', an envoy who will come before the great 'Lord' – a little like a security guard preparing the way for a VIP.

What did a prophet do? A prophet predicts the future. Unlike market analysts, a biblical prophet was recognised as a prophet because they could accurately predict the future.

Was John the Baptist a real historical person? Jewish historian Josephus reports about John the Baptist, He calls him, John, 'that was called the Baptist'. Josephus describes him as 'a good man, and commanded the Jews to exercise virtue, both as to righteousness and to one another, and piety towards God, and so to come to baptism, for that the washing [with water] would be acceptable to him' (*Antiquities 18.5.2*)

What does baptism mean? Baptism means to be 'immersed'. It was a symbol of a new start and a fresh beginning. People were baptised in the river because it symbolised that their old way of life – with all the baggage of failure, shame, mistakes and regrets – was washed away and they could begin a new, fresh way of life. Would starting life afresh sound like good news?

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

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

Do these events seem a bit superstitious and far fetched? i.e. voices from heaven and temptations by Satan. If there really is a spiritual dimension then these 'spiritual' things could indeed happen. We'll explore if there really is a spiritual dimension in the next session.

What does this mean? The quote here is the fulfilment of yet another prophecy (this time from Psalm 2). This is significant because Psalm 2 speaks about the future ruler - the 'special king' (the Messiah).

What is the content of this good news? The good news is about the approaching 'kingdom of God'. This is a new vision for life. The kingdom is also about change. Jesus is saying that the good news is about acknowledging failure and imperfection and 'repenting'. Repent means 'turn around'. Does this seem like good news at all?

How would an encounter with Jesus provide you good news?

Does Jesus seem to be offering any 'good news' so far?

What did Jesus come to do?  
Jesus came to proclaim good news!  
Good news is at the heart of Jesus' message.

## MARK 1:1-15

1 The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, 2 as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way” –

3 “a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
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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. 7 And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 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.” 12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, 13 and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

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!”

# IS THERE A SPIRITUAL DIMENSION?

*Mark 1:16-28*

*"There are no gods, no devils, no angels, no heaven or hell. There is only our natural world.  
Religion is but myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds."  
- Nicole Gaylor (coFounder of the Freedom from Religion Foundation)*

What did Jesus ask these fishermen to do? This wasn't just any stroll by the beach, it was a dramatic encounter with Jesus which meant a radical call to change their vocation and follow Jesus.

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. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.

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

How did the fishermen react after this encounter with Jesus? They left everything for him immediately. It must have been quite some encounter with Jesus. Why did they leave everything so suddenly? There was something about Jesus which inspired immediate response. It even meant that they left their father and their family business to follow him.

There was something about Jesus which inspired immediate response.

What is the Sabbath? The Sabbath was the Jewish day of rest dedicated to God. Jews would gather in synagogues on the Sabbath to be taught from the Scriptures.

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

What do we learn about this encounter with Jesus? He possesses authority. The same authority which persuaded the disciples to leave everything suddenly is on display here as well.

Do things like impure spirits exist? The 'world' of the Bible assumes that there is a spiritual dimension. Is this right?

If there is a spiritual dimension (and the Bible asserts that there is) what is impressive about Jesus here? Again, he has authority and appears to be in control of this spiritual dimension.

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 impure spirits and they obey him.” News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

How do the people respond to this encounter with Jesus? They are amazed at his authority. Jesus has demonstrated authority with the call to his first disciples, he has authority in his teaching and now authority over evil spirits. He appears to be something quite special. Unsurprisingly news spread quickly about him.

Is this good news? It seems that the crowds thought that what Jesus was saying and doing was good news – they spoke about him and news spread in that region.

Is this good news?  
It seems that the people  
think that what Jesus did  
and said was some form  
of good news.

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.

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25 “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” 26 The impure 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 impure spirits and they obey him.” 28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Listen to the story of Julia.

Is there really a spiritual dimension?  
Listen to the story of Julia Pope.

Julia grew up in a non-religious home and had little interest in spiritual things. She accepted the common belief that there wasn't such a thing as a spiritual dimension. Yet something changed. She had an encounter with a spiritual dimension which she couldn't dismiss as superstition.

Does Jesus seem to be offering  
any 'good news' so far?



[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-73-there-spiritual-dimension](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-73-there-spiritual-dimension)

Read: Mark 1:29-2:13

What strikes you about Jesus as you encounter him?  
Is there anything that you read that seems to be good news?

# WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE WORLD?

*Mark 2:13-17*

*"We atheists don't need to go to the doctor. There isn't anything wrong with us"  
- Dan Barker*

## Mark 2:13-17

13 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. 14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

How does Levi respond to his encounter with Jesus? He immediately follows Jesus. His response is similar to the fishermen we saw earlier.

Who were tax collectors and 'sinners'? These were grouped together because they were despised and outcasts. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors because they collected money for the occupying Romans. And 'sinners' were people of dubious moral standing, likely prostitutes. Both groups of people were despised by 'respectable' upstanding religious people.

Why does Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners? This is a good question. It would have been a challenge to 'respectable' religion to see a religious leader eating with the irreligious.

What does Jesus mean here? Jesus is equating physical health with moral standing. He is pointing out that the people he has come to help have acknowledged that they are morally flawed. Like a doctor for the healthy, Jesus does not offer good news to those who don't think they're sick.

Is there something wrong with the world? Jesus is claiming that the world is sick - a human moral sickness. Jesus isn't making up a religious concept here to fail us. He is recognising and acknowledging our moral imperfections and failings. We experience these failings in many ways, in our relationships, in our words, in our inability to live a flourishing life. It is those who can identify with this that Jesus has come to call. If we don't feel that there is anything wrong with us or the world, then perhaps Jesus' message won't be good news to you.

Like a doctor for the healthy, Jesus does not offer good news to those who don't think they're sick.

Listen to the story of Gillian.

Listen to the story of Gillian Porter. Gillian is an experienced GP who regularly meets with sick people. How realistic is the comparison between the doctor and Jesus?

Gillian will share of her encounters with Jesus and the difference it makes to her.

Atheist Dan Barker claims that 'If salvation is the cure, then atheism is the prevention. Just don't get sick.'

How do you react to that statement?



[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-74-what-wrong-world](http://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-74-what-wrong-world)

Read: Mark 2:18-8:26

What strikes you about Jesus as you encounter him?

Some highlights:

Mark 3:1-6

Mark 4:35-41

Mark 7:31-37 (see also Isaiah 35:4-6)

# WHAT DOES A JEW MAKE OF JESUS?

*Mark 8:27 - 9:1*

*"The best of men [...] The first true gentleman that ever breathed."  
- Thomas Dekker*

Who is Jesus? At this point in the narrative, we are being asked to clarify who we think Jesus is. Look at the responses given by the disciples – people were confused by who he was.

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

How do these responses compare with who people say Jesus is today? It is common today for people to see Jesus as a good teacher but nothing more. Perhaps even as 'the first true gentleman', as Thomas Dekker wrote.

How did the disciples answer Jesus' question? Notice Peter's answer: 'Messiah'. Remember: 'messiah' means 'special king promised long ago' (see page 5). If this is true, how one sees Jesus will have significant consequences.

What does Jesus say this Messiah must do? He must suffer, be rejected and die!

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

The events Jesus was describing didn't match what Peter had in mind for what the Messiah had come to do! This is understandable because what use is a 'deliverer' or king if they are dead? Peter's understanding of the mission of the Messiah was consistent with Jewish expectations - where they expected a conquering military warrior. What might have caused Peter to rebuke Jesus?

How does Jesus respond to this rebuke? He explains that these are the 'concerns of God'. His imminent death is something God has planned.

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

What is the response Jesus offers for those who want to follow him? It is not straightforward, it involves sacrifice.

Given that there seems to be sacrifice, why would anyone want to be a disciple of Jesus?

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

What does Jesus mean here? He is outlining a choice: choosing between gaining the temporary things of this world (the whole world) yet forfeiting something more - a connection to the ultimate spiritual reality in the universe.

Having just talked about death, Jesus is making the point that there is more to life than just gaining 'stuff' and experiences.

What is Jesus offering here?  
A relationship with him will give  
the ultimate meaning and  
purpose.

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" 28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."

30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37 Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

9:1 And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

Listen to the story of Martin.

Listen to the story of Martin Pakula.

Martin is a Jew who grew up in a Jewish home - what does he make of Jesus? Does he have similar expectations as Peter?

Could Jesus being the Messiah be good news at all?



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ep-75-what-does-jew-make-jesus](https://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-75-what-does-jew-make-jesus)

Read Mark 9:2-9:13

What does Jesus reveal further about his identity here?  
What strikes you as you encounter him in this section?

HOW CAN I BELIEVE THAT THERE IS MORE  
THAN THIS?

*Mark 9:14-32*

*"Unless you really, truly believe that all you have is a gift from god – and if you do, all power to you, I envy your faith..."*

*- Alyx Gorman*

*"Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence."*

*- Richard Dawkins*

What is the situation Jesus encounters here? It sounds like pandemonium! His disciples are in an argument with the teachers of the law and a large onlooking crowd.

What is the response of the people when they see Jesus? They think that Jesus could solve the problem.

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

“What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.

A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”

What is the problem? A boy has an evil spirit but the disciples can't drive it out. The boy's father has asked Jesus' disciples to heal his son, but they weren't able to do it.

What has overcome the boy? It appears that the boy suffers from some kind of epilepsy. The ancient authors have attributed an evil spirit as the cause of his malady. Does this mean that all epilepsy is the result of evil spirits? No, it would be a mistake to suggest this. There may be some forms of sickness or illness that have spiritual causes, but the Bible doesn't assert that all sickness is the result of evil possession.

“You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”

“From childhood,” he answered. “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

What is Jesus' response to the situation? He is critical of the lack of belief of the people.

Does the man's father believe Jesus can help? It appears that he does not completely trust him. When he asks, 'if you can do anything' he does not have a sure faith that Jesus can heal the boy.

What is faith? Some, like Richard Dawkins, say faith is blind trust in the absence of evidence. But biblical faith is trust, or commitment. This is what people are called to do with Jesus – to have faith in him – to trust him.

Does Jesus mean that if we just believe hard enough we can do absolutely anything? By repeating the question, 'if you can?' Jesus is highlighting the lack of belief of the man. Jesus is pointing him to the correct object of faith - everything is possible for the one who believes... 'in me'.

“If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”

Do you resonate with the boy's father? He has sought alternative methods and implored Jesus' disciples. Ultimately he needs to trust the one who is most powerful - that is Jesus.

Is unbelief simply trying harder to have more faith? There is a sense in which the 'amount' of our faith is irrelevant, it is the object of our faith which is important. The man's comments demonstrate that unbelief isn't trying harder to have more faith, otherwise he wouldn't have admitted unbelief.

**There is a sense in which the 'amount' of our faith is irrelevant, it is the object of our faith which is important.**

What do we learn about Jesus? He is powerful and with a word he can heal. He is worthy of trust and faith.

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

What does this say about faith? Even a little bit of faith is important because it is the object that the faith is placed in which is important. Why couldn't the disciples drive out the demon? Jesus answers that it is only by prayer. The source of the power of the healing is not found in the disciples' power or ability, but it comes only from God. Hence Jesus, who comes with the authority of God, is the only one who is able to bring this healing.

They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

What does Jesus teach his disciples? Jesus predicts the future by saying that himself (the Son of Man) will suffer, die, but will also rise.

How do the disciples react? They don't quite know what to make of what Jesus says.

It was easy for this man to believe in Jesus because Jesus was right in front of him. Is it hard to trust something or someone we can't now see?

**We can believe that there is more than this because Jesus is real; he lived, died and rose again.**

14 When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. 15 As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. 16 “What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.

17 A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” 19 “You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”

20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. 21 Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood,” he answered. 22 “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” 23 “If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

24 Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” 26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.” 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. 28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” 29 He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

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Listen to the story of James.

Listen to the story of James Garth.

He has done research on 'perceptions of faith', and has also read all sorts of religious books and considered many spiritual paths, what is it about Jesus that convinces him?

Does faith in Jesus seem like good news at all?



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ep-76-how-can-i-believe-there-more](https://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-76-how-can-i-believe-there-more)

Read: Mark 9:33–Mark 10:16

What strikes you about Jesus as you encounter him?  
Is there anything that you read that seems to be good news?

# IS JESUS WORTH FOLLOWING?

*Mark 10:17-31*

*"My favorite things in life don't cost any money. It's really clear that the most precious resource we all have is time."*

*- Steve Jobs*

*"What the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies."*

*- Thomas Cranmer*

What do you notice about the young man's approach to Jesus? His posture suggests a sense of urgency and sincerity to seek the answer from Jesus. But is it genuine?

Is the man correct in addressing Jesus as 'Good teacher'? Jesus is also asking the man whether he is ready to acknowledge that Jesus himself is God.

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'"

"Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

These are a part of the 10 Commandments - laws given to the Jewish nation in the Old Testament. What do you make of the man's claim here? Do you think this is true?

How is Jesus' instruction to the young man different from the laws the man has kept since childhood? Jesus looked at this man and saw straight into his heart. Jesus is exposing the man's deepest loves; he was not faultless in keeping all the laws and now he refuses to obey this instruction from Jesus who is God himself.

Why might the man be sad?

Perhaps he has realised that his true treasure lies in his wealth. At this point, it seems that following Jesus was too great a cost to bear for him. It wasn't good news for him.

At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, "Who then can be saved?"

Is Jesus being unfair to the rich here?

Even today, it seems that those who are rich also have power and yet Jesus is saying no one can buy their way into the Kingdom of God - neither with earthly riches nor their actions.

**Jesus repeats himself to emphasise a point - it is difficult for anyone to enter the kingdom of God by themselves.**

How has God made it possible for anyone to enter the Kingdom of God? We see Jesus' speaking in previous chapters about his identity - Jesus is God. What is impossible for man to do - to enter the Kingdom of God - will be possible through Jesus. That sounds like good news!

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God."

Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!"

"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Peter points out that the disciples have actually done what the questioning man couldn't. Did this qualify him for a place in the Kingdom of God?

How does Jesus respond? The key seems to focus not on the action of what you have left behind but for whom you are doing it for. In this case, Jesus says it is 'for me and the gospel'.

What do you receive as a result of following Jesus? Following Jesus leads to many blessings - it's a great way to live. But in this life, following Jesus does not mean a trouble-free life, there will also be persecutions. Not everyone will like people who follow Jesus.

## Mark 10:17-31

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

18 “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good—except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.’”

20 “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”

21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

22 At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is[b] to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”

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Listen to the story of Sharon.

Listen to the story of Sharon Cheung. She grew up following lots of different things but was confronted with the challenge and the beauty of following Jesus.

Why is Jesus worth following for Sharon?



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ep-77-jesus-worth-following](https://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-77-jesus-worth-following)

Read Mark 10:32 – Mark 14:31

What strikes you about Jesus as you encounter him?  
Is there anything that you read that seems to be good news?

## DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?

*Mark 14:32-42*

*"Jesus death was a bad death: painful, awful and etirely preventable"  
- Dick Gross (atheist columnist, The Godless Gross)*

What does Jesus do? He prays and asks his disciples to keep watch.

Why is Jesus troubled? Earlier in Mark we discovered that he had power over sickness, evil spirits and even death itself so whatever troubles Jesus must be very significant. It is so significant that his soul is overwhelmed.

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

What is troubling Jesus? He is facing his imminent death. Yet this is a death unlike other deaths. He wants this suffering to leave him. He knows that he is going to drink a 'cup'.

What is this cup? The cup that Jesus alludes to here is the Cup of Wrath - which is spoken about in Jeremiah 25:15-16 "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. 16 When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them." The Cup is God's punishment for human evil and selfishness. This means that the Cup Jesus is to drink is no ordinary cup, but the wrath of God reserved for human evil.

How did the disciples go in Jesus' moment of crisis? They were falling asleep. It may well have been late but the disciples demonstrate that they are flawed characters. Perhaps we can empathise with them when 'the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak'.

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Simon," he said to Peter, "are you asleep? Couldn't you keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him.

Returning the third time, he said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

Why does Jesus continue praying? He is searching for any other way to avoid this painful and agonising death – one in which he faces the wrath of God for human wickedness.

What will happen to Jesus? Jesus continues to pray, but after three prayers, he knows that the time has come. He will be betrayed by one of his disciples and he will die. Does this outcome mean that Jesus' prayers were useless? No, Jesus received a clear answer to his prayer. He prayed in line with the will of the Father, but the answer to his prayer was negative. This does show that there was no other solution to human evil, in order to save people from their sins, Jesus must die.

**..in order to save people from  
their sins, Jesus must die.**

## Mark 14:32-42

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Listen to the story of Sam.

If Jesus was so powerful, and his death so preventable,  
why did he willingly die?

Listen to Sam Reeve's story. Sam is Senior Pastor of Cross  
Culture Church. Why is an encounter with Jesus in the Garden  
of Gethsemane so important to him?



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ep-78-did-jesus-have-die](https://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-78-did-jesus-have-die)

Read Mark 14:43-15:47

This section recounts the trial and death of Jesus. What do  
you feel when you encounter Jesus in this narrative?

Highlight - Mark 15:27-32

IS THE RESURRECTION JUST  
WISH FULFILMENT?

*Mark 16:1-8*

*"Christianity: if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important."  
- C.S. Lewis (author The Narnia Chronicles)*

Who are these women? These three women were mentioned earlier in Mark's Gospel, they had witnessed the final moments of Jesus' life. They also 'followed him and ministered to him' (chapter 15 verse 41) during his time in Galilee. The fact they were going to anoint Jesus' body indicates that they were not prepared for what they were about to discover at the tomb!

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

The fact that the first witnesses to the resurrection recorded here were women is indication that the story is unlikely to be invented. The testimony of women was not highly valued in the Ancient World. Hence if one were fabricating a story, they would have put authoritative, male witnesses, rather than women.

Why might John have recorded specific time details? This timeline suggests that this was the third day (inclusive) since the death of Jesus. Jesus and many of the Old Testament prophets had predicted that the Messiah would rise in three days (for example; Hosea 6:2)

Three days was significant in Jewish thought because it was common in Jewish thought that the soul departed from the body after three days - indicating that Jesus really was dead, and he didn't simply revive.

The women's questions suggest the stone was too large for man alone to roll away - even if there were three of them!

But when they arrived at the tomb, they discovered the stone had indeed been rolled away.

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed.

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.’”

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

Who was this young man? A messenger of God who confirms that Jesus, the Messiah, has risen from death. Why is this significant? The prophecy that Jesus would rise again in three days has been fulfilled.

What has Jesus defeated? Jesus's victory includes defeating even death!

How did the women react to an encounter with an empty tomb? Understandably they are afraid and bewildered. If you were at this scene, how would you react?

**Jesus's victory includes defeating even death!**

## Mark 16:1-8

1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. 2 Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb 3 and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

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8 Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

**Listen to the story of Helen.**

**The first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus were women,  
how does another woman react to the empty tomb?**

**Listen to the story of Helen Bell and the difference an  
encounter with the resurrection of Jesus makes today.**



[biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/  
ep-79-resurrection-just-wish-fulfilment](https://biggerquestions.org/city/melbourne/episode/ep-79-resurrection-just-wish-fulfilment)

What is the good news about the resurrection of Jesus?

What impact does an encounter with the resurrection of Jesus  
have on you?

What has your experience of encountering Jesus  
been as you've read through the Gospel of Mark?

Has it seemed like there is good news here?

# ? BIGGER QUESTIONS

**B I G G E R Q U E S T I O N S . O R G**

*Bigger Questions is a conversation exploring the big questions of life. In each episode, host Robert Martin interviews a guest and together they tackle questions from the inspirational to the confrontational; sharing stories and seeking answers through the Bible.*

*Bigger Questions is an initiative of City Bible Forum*