

“The Urgent Gospel”

Series: Jesus and His Gospel: Studies in Mark – Part 2

Mark 1:14-20

Introduction: Take your Bibles and turn to Mark 1, Mark chapter 1.

A little over 5 years ago we were preparing for the birth of our third child. We knew that we were having a girl and so excitement was filling our home as the day of her arrival approached. I'll never forget the morning of March 11, 2009 – just like I will never forget any of the days on which my children were born – but this day was especially memorable. It was a Wednesday morning and I had gotten up early to get ready for a breakfast meeting that I was supposed to have at 7am. To my surprise Julie was already awake and laying on the couch and as I was getting ready she gently mentioned to me that she had been up for a little while and was starting to feel like she was having contractions. I asked her if it was serious enough that I should cancel my breakfast meeting and she wasn't sure – so I just decided to play it safe. Julie's body was sending us messages that were going to change our day. At around 7:30 or so we decided that Julie was probably in labor and we should get her to the hospital – which was 30 minutes away – well, 30 minutes on a normal day. Julie called her friend Dana to come watch the boys so that I could take Julie to the hospital. We finally left the house around 8:15 in the morning – right in the middle of the morning rush hour. Now, for those of us who live in Newton, the morning rush might be as bad as sitting 5 cars deep at a stop light, or worse yet, 40 cars deep waiting for a train to pass, but where we lived in PA, the route to the hospital was towards Philadelphia on a major highway, and so traffic was usually very heavy, and often it was stop and go. So, we started on our way, and sure enough, 5 minutes down the road we were sitting in stop and go traffic. The freeway had become a parking lot!

Now, the hospital we were heading to was a place that I had been several times, but it was in a city that I hadn't been in, other than to go to the hospital. And so, I knew this one way to the hospital really well, and I thought I knew some other ways. As we sat in stop and go traffic with my wife increasing in her labor pains I did the manly thing and went a back way to the hospital that I was pretty sure I could figure out as I went. Between pleading with God for help and checking in on my wife without a panicked twinge in my voice I was trying to figure out the place I needed to turn to get to the hospital – and let me tell you – signage is not a forte out East so I was out of luck if I was looking for a road sign that would help me out. I started to panic as we found ourselves in the downtown section of the town where the hospital was and my wife's labor pains were increasing. With every sigh of pain from the passenger seat there was an equally excruciating – Help us Lord – from the driver's seat. Finally, I figured out where I was and saw a road I knew that would take us to the hospital. As we pulled in the parking lot I looked at the clock and it was 9:15. It had taken us well over an hour to make a normally 30

minute trip. We rushed to the maternity ward and they put Julie in an exam room to make sure that she was in labor. Well, it didn't take an exam to figure this out because as soon as Julie walked into that room she had a contraction and the nurse said – Oh, okay, I am pretty sure you're having this baby! As they got Julie settled into the delivery room, the doctor came in to see how things were progressing and to everyone's surprise within a matter of minutes we were gazing upon the beautiful face of our first baby girl. The time stamp on Julie's wristband said 9:28, and our sweet Ashleigh was born at 9:55 – it was a close call!

On that beautiful Spring day in 2009 Julie's body sent us messages that changed our loyalties and re-ordered our steps for that day, and really our lives ever since. The message was so urgent that it demanded an urgent response! In a much more glorious and eternally significant way, the passage before us presents a similar scenario. In Mark 1:14-20 we see Jesus begin his public ministry on Earth and it is a ministry identified by an urgent message. This urgent message demanded an urgent response from those who heard it. Last week in our study we saw the beginning of the Gospel as identified in the three key events of the ministry of the forerunner, the baptism of Jesus, and the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. All of these had to happen in order for the ministry of the Messiah to begin. And so now, in verses 14-20 we see this ministry begin as Jesus comes to Galilee to proclaim the Gospel. Let's read starting in verse 14.

Would you pray with me?

In Mark's account of the life of Jesus of Nazareth the action is fast paced and there is rarely time built into the narrative to sit and process what has happened. Mark is doing this with great precision as he crafts a glorious picture of the power of Jesus. Having come off of the temptation in the wilderness Mark next goes right to the beginning of Jesus' public proclamation of the Gospel of God. The other gospel accounts tell us about other things that happened on the timeline between the temptation in the wilderness and the beginning of his public ministry in Galilee, but Mark goes from one to the next. And in so doing he makes it very clear to us that Jesus had victory over the tempter in the wilderness because after the temptation he emerges and preaches the Gospel of God with great power and authority. Had he been defeated in the wilderness, there would have been no proclamation of this urgent message. The Kingdom of God would not have been at hand if Jesus had not won in the wilderness. But he did win, and here he emerges from the necessary prelude to His public ministry and he heads to Galilee to begin preaching the good news of the Gospel.

Mark says in verse 14 – “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee.” There was an appointed time for Jesus to come. Certain things had to pass before the Messiah could begin His ministry of proclamation. The ministry of the forerunner had to come to an end before the ministry of the Messiah could begin, and now upon John's arrest the time appointed by God is set. Remember that Mark is writing to a primarily Roman audience in Rome itself and so they would not have missed this detail of John's arrest. Those who daily faced the threat of

imprisonment and persecution for following after Christ could not help but be encouraged to identify with John the Baptist – the forerunner to the ministry of Jesus. There is a clear correlation here for the believers in Rome. To hold to the Gospel is to endanger your life. This was true for John the Baptist, for Jesus, and for all of His followers. Not only was this Gospel a dangerous message to those who proclaimed, but at the very heart of this passage we see that the Gospel is an urgent message which calls for an urgent response. The heart of Jesus' ministry on Earth is identified in these verses. He came to proclaim an urgent message. A message that was truly the good news. Jesus was that good news, but Jesus also came to proclaim that good news. The life of Jesus will have this Gospel at its center. In other words, this Gospel defines his life, and his life defines this Gospel. And so, really, these verses are ones that we are to take with us through the rest of our study in Mark. All of Jesus' ministry will be linked to this Gospel. Mark tells us that this Gospel is an urgent message which calls for an urgent response. We are just going to break that statement in half and consider the first half and then the second.

I. The Gospel is an Urgent Message – vs. 14-15a

- a. The Gospel is an urgent message. Unlike John Jesus took the Gospel to the people. John ministered out in the wilderness as he proclaimed a message of repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. Jesus, as this very Messiah, takes this message to the towns and villages of the people. Among the many things that this shows us about Jesus, in Mark's narrative I think it is meant to show us the urgency of the message. This Gospel Jesus is proclaiming is not a message that can wait for people to find the messenger. This is a Gospel so urgent it requires the ultimate messenger to proactively take it to the dwelling places and shops and town squares and hillsides of the people.
- b. It is also of great significance that Jesus started his Gospel proclamation in the region of Galilee. It is significant because this is a theologically strategic region. Isaiah 9:1-2 says this:
 - i. But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. (Isa 9:1-2 ESV)
- c. This Galilee was prophesied as the land in which there had been contempt, but now in the latter time the way of the sea would be filled with a great light! This great light is the Messiah who has not started his ministry of proclaiming the good news in the Temple or even in the region of Judea, but rather he finds himself in the common and often disregarded land of the North – Galilee. This Gospel was not just for the spiritually and socially elite – in fact, it was not even primarily for them. For in Jesus beginning his ministry of proclamation in Galilee

we clearly understand this to be a Gospel for the common man and woman of Israel.

- d. But it was not just a Gospel for the Jew. Jesus starting his ministry in Galilee was not just theologically significant and strategic, but it was also missionally strategic. As the plan of redemption unfolds through the ministry of Christ it will become obvious – especially in the book of Mark – that this Gospel is not just for the Jewish people. The light has shone first in Galilee to signify the missional significance of this region. This region of the world was in many ways the crossroads of the world as the many of the major trade routes converged in this small section of geography. This Gospel would prove urgent for all peoples, not just for the Jewish people.
- e. We especially know this Gospel to be urgent because of two phrases found in verse 15. Mark tells us that Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.”
- f. Because the Time is Fulfilled
 - i. The urgency of the Gospel is seen in the fact that the time is fulfilled. At the beginning of the service we read from Galatians 4 where it says that when the fullness of time had come God sent forth His Son. The Greek word used for time in Galatians 4 has the idea of a chronological moment. In other words, that verse is telling us that God waited until the perfect moment to send forth His Son. He knew where it was on the chronological calendar of time and he sent His Son at that moment in time.
 - ii. But the Greek word used for time in Mark 1 has more the idea of an appointed or decisive moment. The word itself draws attention to factors other than calendars and more towards the decisive or significant act or event being accomplished in that moment. So, Jesus coming to Earth was at just the right point in the course of human history – it was the right time chronologically for Him to come. But the beginning of His ministry is also at the decisive or appointed moment. By this phrase – the time is fulfilled – the urgency of the Gospel shines through. All of the events of God’s redemptive plan up to this point have led to this decisive moment. The Messiah is on Earth. God has taken human flesh upon himself and he has come to proclaim that this decisive moment has arrived – the moment of which all other events in God’s redemptive work have pointed. The ministry of the Gospel has begun. There is good news to be heard and this good news is urgent news. The time is fulfilled.
- g. Because the Kingdom of God is at Hand
 - i. It is also urgent because the Kingdom of God is at hand. This is a parallel phrase to the first. The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. They go together. At this decisive point in God’s work of redemption the

Kingdom of God is near – in fact it is so near that it is at hand. I will reserve most of my comments about the Kingdom of God until tonight's message, but for now let me just say that we have a tendency to take this idea of the Kingdom of God and we try to define it too simplistically. We want one definition that will nicely and adequately fit all of the references of Scripture – but this just won't work. What is important to our study this morning is to note the urgency of this reality. Jesus is preaching the good news that the time is fulfilled and that the kingdom of God is near. In other words, in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, there is some way in which the Kingdom of God is brought to within the reach of the hands of the people to which Jesus was speaking. We will see in the passages to come that Jesus displays the glorious power of the Kingdom Ruler as he casts out demons and heals the sick. Certainly, in the person of Jesus the Kingdom of God has come near to the people of Galilee in Mark 1.

- ii. The aspect of this that you cannot miss is the urgency. It is because the Kingdom of God is at hand that the message has a great urgency to it. The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Certainly this is an urgent message for the people of Galilee.
- iii. Now, in light of this Jesus who has triumphed over Satan in the wilderness, and who has come to the people with the Good News of the Gospel, you would expect some glorious and miraculous display of God's power to kick off this Earthly ministry of the Messiah. If the Kingdom of God is breaking into the Earthly and physical realm then we would expect some never to be forgotten display of power and might. We would expect the Messiah to immediately display some kind of supernatural force that would affect physical and political realms.
- iv. But this is not what we see at the end of verse 15 and through verse 20. It is clear in all of the Gospels that Jesus worked extra hard to re-define the people's understanding of what the Kingdom of God was, what it was like, and how it was that someone entered into the Kingdom. In Mark's Gospel this begins right away because as we said – we would expect to read next of some mightily miraculous act to kick off the ministry of Jesus with a boom. But instead, this urgent Gospel is tied indelibly to an urgent response. This is because the Kingdom of God that is at hand is not a kingdom that is primarily physical and political. It is associated to that Kingdom of God that will one day be physically on this Earth and will most definitely be the political entity that rules the entire world, but this is not the Kingdom that is at hand in Mark 1. And so, what we know about this Kingdom that is at hand is that the King of this Kingdom, Jesus Himself, is much more interested in the powerful Gospel of that Kingdom

and its ability to save a soul from the grip of sin. He did not come at the fullness of time so that he could display political and physical power – he came to save souls from the grip of sin! And because of this, the urgent message of the Gospel calls for an urgent response.

II. Which Calls for an Urgent Response – vs. 15b-20

- a. And so at the end of verse 15 we find a dual imperative – repent and believe in the gospel. These two commands form the necessarily urgent response of all who hear the proclamation of this gospel of Jesus Christ. Just as with the messages that my wife’s body sent to us on that Spring day in 2009 required an urgent response – so this message of the gospel requires an urgent two fold response.
- b. Urgent Response of Repentance – vs. 15b
 - i. The first of the dual imperatives is to repent. This call to repent in light of the urgent message of the Gospel is a call to have a change of mind about all things. These Jews in Galilee were not previously living in light of the fact that the time was fulfilled and the Kingdom of God was at hand. They were just going about normal life. They may have thought and hoped for the Kingdom of God, as was often the case for the Jewish mind. They may have even prayed for it to come, but now Jesus tells them – it is here, it is close, it is at hand, and because of that you must repent. This gospel message required new loyalties in life and new patterns of thought and behavior. This good news demanded this response. And so, just like I had to change my plans on March 11, 2009 because this urgent message of an impending birth demanded my full attention, so also Jesus was proclaiming that this news of the Kingdom demanded a change of mind.
- c. Urgent Response of Belief – vs. 15b
 - i. Coupled with this change of mind was a change of trust, of belief. Repentance is a call to turn away from something and believe is a call to turn to something different. And so this urgent message requires both sides of this same coin. Turn from other things and turn to this thing. Turn from little to no thought about the kingdom of God and turn to the Messiah who is here presenting the Kingdom of God to you. Believe the message not simply by mental assent, but by full trust of your entire being. This is not simply a call to believe the message in your head, but this is a call to stake your life on this message by fully trusting in this good news. The call of the gospel is so encompassing, as we will see in a minute with four men’s reactions to it, that to be confronted with it is to be confronted with a completely life-altering reality. The call to belief presupposes the response of repentance. They go hand in hand and cannot be separated. You cannot believe without repenting of previous allegiances and commitments. You also cannot have this response over part of life and not over other parts of life. Either you actually believe the

Gospel and it affects every area of your life through repentance and belief, or you don't. And if you partially believe and partially repent then you have neither repented nor believed. These are all-encompassing and urgent responses to the Gospel – repent and believe. Because the Kingdom of God is at hand and the time is fulfilled your life must change in that you must repent and believe. This is the message of the gospel.

d. Producing Life-Altering Results – vs. 16-20

- i. And so verses 14-15 describe the essence of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. He came and proclaimed the urgent message of the gospel which demanded the urgent response of repent and believe. And now in verses 16-20 we see this broad call to all people narrowed down to four men – Simon, Andrew, James, & John.
- ii. These men are two sets of brothers who made their living as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Simon and Andrew are Greek names which gives a hint as to the influence of the Greco-Roman world on this region of Israel. Because it was the crossroads of the world, it had experience and apparently adopted some parts of the Greco-Roman culture. This would have been especially encouraging to the Mark's Roman audience. The Gospel message is broadly given and then when the narrative narrows in on specific men, the first two mentioned have Gentile sounding names. They were Jewish men, but they were Jewish men who had Greco-Roman ties. Again, this is another clue in the text that Jesus' mission is not simply to the Jewish people. It is first to them, but it goes far beyond them, to all peoples, tribes, and tongues.
- iii. As Mark tells us about Jesus' interaction with these four men we are given no unnecessary detail and his re-telling moves at the speed of lightning. If we are not careful we could easily read over these 4 verses and miss so much of the point. We could also read over these 4 verses and be plagued by so many questions. Questions like – did these men know Jesus before this interaction? It seems pretty strange that they would just drop everything and start a whole new life following after a guy they just met. The other gospel accounts give us more details which help us to know that these four men had seen and heard Jesus before and apparently Andrew at least was a disciple of John the Baptist and he had the first interaction with Jesus and told the other about it. But Mark is not wanting to give us all of the details because he has a different point. It is not that the details are unimportant, it is that he will lose his point if he gives us all of the details. And so he simply tells us that Jesus saw them as he passed alongside the Sea of Galilee and they were casting a net into the Sea to catch fish. And so Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And the text says that immediately the left

their nets and they went and followed him. And he kept going a little farther along on the Sea of Galilee and he saw James and John the sons of Zebedee. They too were fishermen and they were in their boat mending their nets. And so he called them too and the text tells us that they left their father Zebedee and the hired servants in the boat and they got up and followed Jesus.

- iv. This is all of the detail that Mark wants us to know because he is making the point to us that this Jesus had an unusually powerful and urgent message that demanded and unusually urgent response that produced life-altering results. In this Mark is pointing us to further understanding of what it means to repent and believe. This essential and urgent call of the Gospel is fleshed out in the lives of these four men. This is what it looks like to repent and believe. It means to leave and follow. Notice in verse 18 and verse 20 that this is the corresponding action of Simon and Peter and James and John to the dual command of the gospel. So Mark tells us that the essential nature of the Gospel's call is to repent and believe in verse 15. Now in the context of real life the corresponding actions to repenting and believing is to leave and follow.
- v. Now, to be clear, this does not mean that they never fished again – because we know that they do. This does not mean that they never see their families again – for we have an account of Jesus going to Simon's house and healing his mother-in-law. We also know that someone had to keep a boat because they often use the boat to cross the Sea of Galilee. So, it is not an absolute break from their past life, but it is a complete shift in their loyalty and in their identity. They were identified as fishermen before. This was their life and their loyalty. But in light of the urgent message of the gospel their loyalties were altered and their life course was reset. They were no longer identified as fishermen, but now they were identified as followers of Jesus of Nazareth.
- vi. Notice the unqualified subject of the call of Jesus to these men. Follow me. Jesus is himself at the center of this imperative. These men know what they must change their minds from and what they must change their minds to. They must get up and follow Jesus. This is a most unusual beginning to the powerful proclamation of the Gospel. It was not kicked off with the bang of physical and political power, but rather, the Kingdom of God being at hand was first seen by Jesus calling to himself a group of men who were socially insignificant in a small corner of the world. Obviously this mission that Jesus is on is different than mankind would expect. There must be something more than just the domination of all other world powers in the mind of Jesus. He must be more concerned with the domination of mankind's hearts and lives. He must be most

concerned with this urgent message of the Gospel to call people to new loyalties and life-altering allegiances. He must be concerned with rescuing people from condemnation by calling them to follow after the Lamb who would take away the sins of the world. And we have the privilege to know the rest of the story. We know that this Jesus of Nazareth goes on to prove throughout his ministry that He is indeed the very Son of God, the Promised One, the Messiah of God's people. And yet God's people will reject this Messiah and He will be the suffering servant who willingly places himself under the punishment of other men's sins. Through His perfect life lived in full obedience to the Father, and through His substitutionary death on the Cross for us, and through His powerful resurrection from the dead in which he makes eternally known that he has conquered sin – through all of this the most powerful act of the Kingdom of God is made possible – the salvation of a soul from the penalty of sin.

Conclusion: I wonder this morning if this urgent message had brought life altering results to your life. Do you hear the call of the gospel upon you? Do you understand that this same Jesus who called Simon and Andrew and James and John has a call upon your life as well? You cannot be neutral to this Gospel. You will either hear and repent and believe, or you will reject and continue on your own way. If you are here this morning and this Jesus is beckoning you through this text to repent of all other allegiances and loyalties and come to Him in faith – then I say to you friend – you better go. You better get up and follow Him. Do not follow me, do not follow a religion, do not follow a friend, and do not follow culture. Follow Jesus through repentance and belief.