



## The Missionary God Calls Us to Follow Him

### The Gospel of Mark, Part 3

#### Mark 1:14-20

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It's a joy to be in church with you today. Let's pick up in our series and read Mark 1:14-120. Let's hear God's Word together:

*<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."*

*<sup>16</sup> Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> And immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>19</sup> And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. <sup>20</sup> And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.*

This is God's Word. Let me pray.

Jesus, You're on the move. You're active in this world and You're calling us. This room is evidence of Your ministry and work. We love You and pray that You would help us see how great You are. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I don't know where the iconic '70s folk singer Bob Dylan is right now, but I think he's still doing tours. I want to draw attention to the lyrics of one of his songs that I think is quite profound. He wrote, "You're going to have to serve somebody. It may be the devil, it may be the Lord—but you're going to have to serve somebody." I think his observation actually fits with Scripture.

We read in 1 John 5:19, "*We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*" Jesus declared in Mark 1:15, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.*" God was doing something new and glorious. A greater David was about to take the throne. It's good news for us that God was reestablishing His Kingdom through Jesus Christ.

It took boldness for Jesus to announce His own Kingdom. After all, He was speaking this in the middle of the Roman empire, among people who were faithful to the lordship of Caesar. Yet Jesus was now announcing the arrival of an alternative Kingdom, but notice that Jesus did not tell the people that their main problem was the Roman empire. Rather, Jesus was seeking to subvert the rule of another king: Satan himself. John the Baptist had told the people that One more powerful than him was coming.

Jesus described His Kingdom through a parable in Mark 3:27: *“But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.”* That’s what Jesus Himself was doing. As David spoke about last week, Jesus won out over Satan’s temptations. Rather, He was binding Satan so He could plunder Satan’s house, taking back what was rightfully His. Like Bob Dylan said, we have to serve somebody—either the devil or the Lord.

When Jesus said, “The time is fulfilled,” it’s like a story line where the plot comes to a climax. This reminds us that God isn’t randomly watching history. That idea is deism, which teaches that God started history but then distanced Himself to watch what would happen. But in fact God is near, watching and caring for His people—and it’s been this way from the beginning.

When God created the world, He made man in His own image. Adam and Eve were created to be vice regents to rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. But instead of ruling creation, a serpent ruled them. They rejected God’s rule and thus gave up their own rule. But even then, God did not abandon them. He pursued them and promised that one day a Redeemer would come who would crush the head of the serpent and who would reestablish His rule (Genesis 3:15).

God repeated this promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We also read it again in the writings of the prophets, where they spoke of a coming Savior, a Servant King. All these pointed to Jesus. Mark now wastes no time in declaring that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. Isaiah also prophesied that John the Baptist would pave the way. When John finally arrived, all heaven broke loose. The Father spoke, “This is My beloved Son” and the Spirit descended on Jesus. Angels ministered to Him in the wilderness. Mark wasted no time in making it clear that the time had come for the King to arrive. The call to them was, “Repent and believe in the gospel.” In King Jesus, the powerful presence of God has come and He demands our total allegiance.

We’re going to serve somebody. We’re going to look at our passage today under three headings: 1) The expectation of God’s Kingdom, 2) The announcement of God’s Kingdom, and 3) The response God’s Kingdom demands of us.

## The Expectation of God's Kingdom

We might pass over Mark 1:14 without thinking much about it: *“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.”* Of course, we'd expect Jesus to proclaim the gospel of God, but to put it right next to John being arrested raises a question. After all, we just learned that Jesus is the Son of God, filled with the Holy Spirit. He defeated Satan's temptations. John himself told us that Jesus was more powerful than anyone.

Yet He seemed to be powerless to rescue John, the one who introduced Him. At least that's what it looks like. Instead He's talking about good news, even though John was in prison. The word “arrested” in verse 14 meant to be handed over. Mark used that word 12 times in his Gospel, culminating in the arrest of Jesus Himself. In Mark 9:31, Jesus tells His disciples, *“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.”*

How does this relate to the expectation of the Kingdom Jesus was bringing? The Kingdom would not be what we would expect. For His Kingdom to come, Jesus first had to be rejected. Long before He will come in victory, riding a white horse at the end of history, He would ride on a donkey and be given over into the hands of men to be killed. But that should not surprise us, if we look at the Old Testament storyline.

The prophets pointed to a Servant King. Jesus was not a typical Roman emperor. Rather, He was the complete opposite, coming as a Servant. Isaiah spoke of this in Isaiah 52:13: *“Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.”* We understand that part about the Servant being exalted. But Isaiah tells us that He is exalted through humiliation. In Isaiah 53:3 we read, *“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”* This is how He will bring in His Kingdom. That's the kind of King Jesus is.

So Mark 1:14 is something of a window into this truth, sort of like a movie trailer—the two-minute version to get us ready for the two-hour version. Trailers usually have the best parts, which is why my oldest daughter tells me not to watch them. In a sense, verse 14 is introducing us to coming attractions. It's letting us know what kind of Kingdom is coming.

Then with the expectation of being exalted through humiliation, let's look at the announcement.

## The Announcement of God's Kingdom

In light of that setting, see what Jesus says in verse 15: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.”* We've already had a hint regarding what kind of Kingdom this would be. These are the first words of Jesus that Mark records. We've heard the Father speak; we've seen the Spirit ascending; we've seen the angels on mission, but now we're hearing from Jesus.

Normally a new regime that intends to take over another kingdom doesn't announce it before the overthrow. Rather, they usually come in with stealth—perhaps with spies—in order to conquer. Jesus simply announced it, before He has any followers, before the cross, before any miracles. He told the people, “The Kingdom of God is here in your midst.”

This has to catch our attention. What other regime not only announces their takeover publicly, but actually declares it before the victory? He hadn't done anything yet, but He declared His Kingdom had arrived. He tells the people, “Repent and believe.” So why would Jesus do it this way? He didn't try to take over while the people were sleeping, nor to attack them like a sniper. Rather, He came to call the people into His Kingdom.

The difference is that this was a gracious King Who knew He would be giving Himself for the people. He was inviting them to turn from their old ruler and come to Him before it was too late. It was an urgent message. “I'm here to rescue you. I'm here to draw you into My Kingdom.” Notice that Jesus used the phrase “the gospel of God” in verse 14, but then in verse 15 He spoke of “the Kingdom of God.” Let's think about what the difference would be between the gospel and the Kingdom.

In our day, we're used to the word “gospel.” We use it all the time in our church. We consider the gospel to be of first importance. We recently did a series called “Preach the Gospel to Yourself.” You'll see on our website, one of our church values is “the functional centrality of the gospel.” If you're not sure what that means, ask me about it sometime. We've name our small group ministry “Gospel Communities.” We design all our preaching to be gospel-centered. Our doctrinal statement is adapted from The Gospel Coalition. I think you get the point. We use that word a lot and we mean every bit of it. We're a gospel-centered church.

In other contexts in your life you may have heard the term “Kingdom” used as an adjective to describe certain ministries. For example, “Kingdom-centered prayer,” “a Kingdom vision,” “a Kingdom lifestyle,” or “a Kingdom ethic.” You might have been told to have “a Kingdom mindset.” So why don't we use that word here more often? I don't know if it's because we're Reformed Protestants and we might think it's too triumphalistic. Also, based on our history as Americans, we're not a fan of kingdoms in general. We look at constitutional monarchies like England or

Thailand, and while they do have great weddings, we still are not fans of an absolute monarchy. So that might be why we don't think in terms of a kingdom.

As we study Mark, we're going to see this language a lot. He uses the phrase "Kingdom of God" quite a bit. Perhaps as David continues to preach through this book, the term will become more interesting to us. After all, Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "*Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*"

In fact, the framework Jesus often used was that of the Kingdom of God. It was the lens through which He understood Himself and His calling. Gospel and Kingdom do go together. The gospel announces the coming reign of the King. Jesus wasn't the first one to use the word "gospel." It was a common Greek word during His day. When Caesar Augustus first became the emperor of Rome in 30 B.C., he spread gospel announcements around, publicly announcing himself as the new ruler, the new god.

Jesus wasn't referring to another gospel of Caesar. His gospel was the gospel of God. It was God's public announcement that His Kingdom was near. Because of this, the people were being warned to repent and believe. It was a serious announcement: a King has arrived! The people needed to respond. They needed to accept its reality as being a proclamation of God.

It might seem to us that this Kingdom was actually coming in rather secretly. The parables Jesus spoke about the Kingdom sometimes made it appear hidden. He compared it to a seed that would grow into a tree—and seeds are not really that obvious or powerful. But we should not be fooled. God was in fact bringing His Kingdom to earth.

There's a tension, however. The Kingdom was said to be "at hand." That might mean it was just around the corner, or it might mean that it was actually present in their midst. Both meanings seem to be valid. God's Kingdom is here, but it isn't yet fully here. That's the tension. We can see the in-breaking of God's authority in the world with many victories. There is repentance and faith. There's growth in our lives. There's actual love for the Lord. There's praise and genuine answers to prayer. Lost people are being won to Christ.

These are authentic victories. We see the growth of the church in Latin America and globally east of us in China and Asia. The gospel is working profoundly around the world. God's Kingdom is breaking in, drawing people to Christ. We also have victories in our own lives. Marriages are being healed. Relationships are being reconciled. There's no question that God's Kingdom is already here.

Yet we struggle and sin remains. We're waiting for the final healing. Not every relationship works out. People die in their sickness. We still bury our family. There is much God has promised to bring and do that we've not seen yet. So the Kingdom is already here, but not yet. Still, we see

pointers that show us it's coming. We have glimpses and hints; we wait for its final revelation. We're called to believe in and follow what sometimes seems to be a powerless King, but in reality He is the supreme authority over the world.

Mark brings the Kingdom talk to a climax at the cross. He will show us the enthronement of Jesus, not like that of a Roman emperor on a cushioned seat, but on a wooden cross. Above His head, in all the languages of the region—Hebrew, Aramaic and Latin—the sign read “King of the Jews.” That's our King. That's Who we follow. This is what should shape us. He's bringing a Kingdom unlike any kingdom we've ever known.

Greg Gilbert reminds us that there's only one gospel, not two. The gospel of the Kingdom and the gospel of the cross are one and the same. He says, “The gospel of the Kingdom necessarily includes the gospel of the cross. More specifically, the gospel of the cross is the fountainhead of the gospel of the Kingdom.” In other words, the cross is the means by which we enter the Kingdom of God.

It might help if I give you a definition of the Kingdom besides just the reign of God. Think of it this way: it's God's reign through God's people over God's creation. That's a quote from someone, but I can't remember who. It's God's reign through God's people over God's creation. This will help you navigate what is meant by the Kingdom of God.

Even though it's not yet fully realized, we're still called to respond. Even though the Kingdom of God is not dependent on human effort, we're still called to play a part. We're called to allegiance to Jesus. Even though the Kingdom of God is hidden, we are still called to repent and believe. These are the expectations. So how do we respond to this announcement from Jesus that the time has come and the Kingdom of God is at hand?

### **The Response God's Kingdom Demands of Us**

The first word Jesus used is “repent.” If you hear someone tell you to repent, that means there's something wrong. We're not okay. He's not assuring us, “You're fine. Don't worry about this.” He's saying, “Repent.” There's something wrong.

I picture one of my kids with a driver's education teacher in the passenger seat. He's going the wrong way down a one-way street. The instructor is screaming, “Turn around! You're going the wrong way.”

That's what repent means. It means to turn from sin and trust in Jesus. It's a rescue word; it's not a bad thing. Don't think of Jesus as being self-righteous or judgmental, or that He wants to crush all the fun out of our lives. No, no, no. The word “repent” is intended to rescue us, calling us

to safety. It's like a father wanting to protect his children. It's a call to turn away from something wrong. Don't think of it as something negative.

There are counterfeit ways to repent. There's a worldly kind of sorrow that thinks, "I just don't want to get in trouble." You'll know your repentance is real when you turn to Jesus. The call is to repent and believe in Jesus. Without faith in Jesus, it's not Christian repentance.

Many of us think the gospel is summed up in Mark 1:15. You preach the gospel, you call for repentance and faith, make a decision for Jesus and pray the prayer. But what are we supposed to do with the rest of the gospel? What do verses 16-20 have to do with our mission? What did Jesus mean when He said, "Follow Me"? Some people might see this as separate. A person repents and believes, but following Jesus is negotiable. But that's not true. Mark doesn't pause here between these verses. You cannot receive Jesus as your Savior and negotiate Him as your Lord and King.

As a matter of fact, to be a Christian is to be a disciple. Consider how radical this is. Mark gives us a story about four men who left everything to follow Jesus and he's telling us that this is what repentance and faith should lead to. The Greek words for "repent" and "believe" are not verbs whose tense implies a momentary, one-time action. They're used in the present imperative tense, which means they're ongoing.

Think about it this way: God's Kingdom is about us repenting and believing every day. That's the Kingdom Christ brought into the world. "Follow Me" in verse 17 is not separate from "repent and believe" in verse 15. Following Jesus means living a life of repentance. It means we abandon living for our own interests and selfish ambitions. Our little kingdom must be given over to His Kingdom. We must adopt a new way of life that He will teach us. Being born again means to see and accept His authority in our lives.

In short, verses 16-20 are not a call to a separate class of Christians. It's not that some believe and are saved, but others are also called to discipleship. To believe is to respond to His call to follow Him. Consider the first word in verses 16: "passing." Jesus was on the move. He was on a mission. Right after He announced the Kingdom, He went to work building it. This was the first day of His public ministry and already He was passing the Sea of Galilee.

Notice, He didn't head up to Rome to overthrow the other emperor. Rather, He stayed on the obscure shores of Galilee. There He found Simon and Andrew casting their nets into the sea. These were circular nets that were thrown out from the shore. Jesus said to them, "*Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.*" Mark tells us, "*And immediately they left their nets and followed him.*"

Without any pause, Jesus went on a little farther until He found James the son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in their boat, mending their nets. "*And immediately he called*

*them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.”*

Again we sense the urgency and movement in what Jesus was doing. Of course, calling these four men was just the beginning. Jesus’ whole mission was to draw people into the Kingdom of God.

As he writes this account, Mark doesn’t seem concerned that we might be baffled by it, but we do have to wonder if these men had any idea Who Jesus was. Why would they listen to Him? Why would they leave everything behind to follow Him? But Mark doesn’t give us any answers to these questions. John later does provide us with more context for this story, suggesting there might have been time to build at least some sort of relationship, or that they might have known each other prior to this call.

Why does Mark simply cut to the chase here? Why so much action and so little explanation? I think he may have wanted us to realize how very compelling Jesus was just by His presence. In other words, to follow Him was the most logical and sane reaction they could have had. These men immediately knew they needed Jesus and that He was worth everything they had to leave behind. Jesus was so powerful and so unique, there was nothing else they could have done.

In fact, as we read through Mark, we’ll see in every passage how he brings us back to the reality of Who Jesus is. He wanted his readers to sense how very compelling Jesus was as a Person, One we would want to follow, no matter the cost. So let’s look for a few minutes at what exactly it means to follow Jesus. What does it mean to be His disciple? Fundamentally, to be a disciple means to be with someone for the purpose of learning from them and ultimately becoming like them.

We see this in the story. First, Jesus simply invited these men to be with Him. He wanted them to know Him—and He wants the same for us. He wants us to know Him, to love Him and to learn how much He loves us. Notice, Jesus called these men by name. He knew Simon and Andrew, John and James. He was personal with them, then they dropped everything to be with Him.

I might have said, “Just let me grab my Kindle, or my phone, in case this lasts all day.” But that’s not what we read in this text. No one says, “Let me first do something.” As a matter of fact, later in His ministry Jesus does encounter some people who have something to do first—and He really challenged them concerning this. In order to be with Jesus, you have to be very intentional.

Maybe it’s like us telling our family, “You’ve got to be here at such a time, because this is when we’re going to eat. Also, no phones at the table. We’re going to be together. No eating fast so you can sneak out. Sit down and stay until we’re all done.” Jesus wants us to be that way with

Him. There's a deliberate, intentional call to spend time with Him and we need to desire that as well. We make time for what matters to us and we need to set aside our distractions. Clearly it was important that these men were with Jesus for a season before He actually expected them to do something.

The second thing we see is that they were expected to learn from Him. The word "disciple" means one who learns from a teacher. A disciple is a student of someone else; in this case, a rabbi. We too become His students and learn from Him. He obviously loved to teach. While a big part of the gospel involves the cross and His substitutionary atonement, there is a lot left that is connected to His miracles and His teachings. He wants us to learn from Him. What does He say about marriage, sexuality, money, our calendar and time and priorities? He has a lot to tell us and we need to be good students.

In Old Testament times, and even in Christ's day, rabbis would wait for disciples. They would have some sort of resume—some listing of their qualifications—to entice young men to study with them. But not Jesus. He went after His disciples, calling them out to follow Him. Over time He revealed to them what they treasured—their wallets and their calendars—and slowly showed them how He viewed these things.

One of the more challenging things He taught them was how to love their neighbors. It troubled the Pharisees to see how much Jesus loved people. He ate with sinners and tax collectors. Following Jesus means we'll learn how to love people who are different from us. He will take us out of our comfort zones.

Of course, learning from Jesus isn't like a typical classroom. It's not just 12 Bible studies and we're done. Rather, we follow Him, then as we're with Him, we learn what it means to do ministry the way He does it. All of this is definitely life-changing. We need to remember that Christ's ultimate goal is to have a multi-ethnic heaven—with people from every tribe, tongue and nation—and He calls us to take part in reaching this goal. We're going to be loving people who are different from us. This is the Kingdom He's bringing, based on love and sacrifice.

We in the West live in a very individualistic culture but notice how community-minded Jesus' vision is. He called two brothers in this story; He also calls us to work together as a family. Then at the end of that first day, Jesus ended up in Simon Peter's house, where He healed Simon's mother-in-law. He's not pulling them into isolation; rather, He's bringing them into community.

In fact, He's creating a new community, what we now call the church. He was building His church one brick at a time. This would be a community of people who would identify with Him and be unified with each other. While we start with leading one person at a time to be saved, which of

course brings joy in heaven, our purpose is to make disciples who are then baptized and begin to learn from Jesus.

So the progression is this: be with Jesus, learn from Him, then become like Him. If someone were to ask us what the goal of being a Christian is, we could tell them, “We’re on a lifetime journey to be maturing into Christ-likeness. We desire to become more and more conformed into the image of Jesus. He’s rescued us and He is now in the process of transforming us.” Both are part of His Kingdom mission. The gospel of the cross speaks of His rescue, then the purpose of His ongoing work in our lives is to make us like Himself. And this does take a lifetime.

Think of four seasons in a year. Summer months are great and there are times in the course of following Him when it seems like summer vacation. There are times of real joy, when we’re loving God and learning so much. But then there are other seasons that bring winter storms and hurricanes and darkness. We experience sickness and anxieties. We can even fall back or turn away for a time. We can stumble. But in each of these seasons there are things we can learn, as we continue to become true followers of Christ.

Consider what Jesus told these four men: *“Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”* True disciples of Christ are called to make other disciples for Him. He helps us to help others. The Christian community is not a stagnant swamp, but a flowing stream. This is His promise to us, that He will make us “fishers of men.” It’s not a duty that we will be overwhelmed by. Instead, it’s a promise He Himself will fulfill through us.

Think of the image of humanity being in an underworld, under water, trapped, separated and in need of rescue. They’re in a dark place and God is saying, “My purpose is to draw people up into My Kingdom—and you’re going to be a part of that.” God rules through His people over creation. They will be fishing for Him.

This is the glory of the gospel—what Jesus is doing in His Kingdom. The Kingdom is God’s reign and to be Christ’s disciple is to be with Him, to learn from Him and to become like Him. That’s because God’s goal for the whole world and all of human history is to glorify His beloved Son in the midst of the people He has rescued and transformed. What a glorious vision!

Let’s pray.

Father in heaven, we’re humbled at this. This is more than we even understand. This is so much more glorious than any of us fully realize. But we want to get it. I pray that You would help us. Move our hearts and minds to grasp what You’re doing here, Jesus. What a humble beginning for your church—four people—yet it’s wonderful and powerful as well. We pray that You would shape our hearts and minds around this understanding. We ask You to give us Your Holy Spirit as

we remember the Lord's death and resurrection at the Communion Table. Prepare us now, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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