

The Gospel at Advent – to the Neighborhoods

Mark 1:1-15

Pastors Russ Kennedy and Tim Nixon

¹ The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
 who will prepare your way,
³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness:
 ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
 make his paths straight,’ ”

Gospel Understanding – Pastor Russ Kennedy

The gospel begins with the advent of Jesus.

The Inauguration of the good news (v.1)

Mark is looking to the opening in Genesis just John did for the opening of his book many years later. In the beginning... But, for Mark, this is more of the gospel begins with what follows.

The good news is of or about, Jesus. The good news is about a person who came, was born and lived in real time and space. This is his human name. This is the Greek form of the Hebrew name, Joshua. It means, “a savior, a deliverer.” His name, Jesus, is meant to be associated with His humanity. He was a real man. He had real flesh and blood. He had a name. His human name is to remind us of the importance of His incarnation.

It is the good news that the promised Messiah, the Christ, has come. Though the word “Christ” often follows Jesus’ name, it is actually a title. It means “anointed one” or “messiah”. It is not his last name. It is the title of the One who was promised all through the Old Testament. This title, this designation, is very important. We tend to miss it. No Jew who knew his Old Testament would. Mark is saying the good news is about the one who was promised, prophesied and portrayed all through the Old Testament. This word also points to Jesus’ authority. This man, this fulfiller of Old Testament Scripture, has authority. He is not a mere man. He is not merely a good teacher or amazing prophet. He is ever so much more. Mark will often show Jesus’ unexpected and universal authority. All He commands obey Him, wind, seas, demons, disease, death. But men don’t. How can that be? How will that be addressed and redressed?

It is good news about this One who is also the Son of God. Mark is declaring that Jesus is God. He is not merely a man. He is also the second person of the Godhead. He is not an angel. He is not any other spiritual being. He is divine. The gospel then declares to us that the One who was prophesied in the Old Testament and came to us as the Lord was both human and divine.

This is utterly critical when we think about telling the gospel to the Lost.

It means that at the heart of the gospel is the Trinity. There is One God who is three persons. He is not three gods. He is the one and only true God. The One God is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as three distinct persons. If you are telling the gospel and someone challenges the Trinity, you MUST address it. You cannot dismiss it as insider truth. Many will say not to bring up the Trinity when you are telling the gospel to Muslims. This is wrong. If anyone you are talking to hears you talk about the Trinity and rejects it no matter what his religion or irreligion, the Spirit has not yet awakened or regenerated that person. When I am talking to a Jehovah Witness, a Mormon, a Muslim, a Hindu, if the question comes up, I simply tell the truth. Do you believe in the Trinity?

It means that at the heart of the gospel is the humanity of Jesus. To deny that He was supernaturally born of a woman and thus was truly human in all ways that it means, except for being a sinner, is to deny the gospel. Any “gospel” that does not affirm the full and whole humanity of Jesus is not the “good news” of the Bible. Do you believe that Jesus is man?

It means that at the heart of the gospel is the authority of Jesus. Jesus is Lord. He is the Lord Jesus. Contrary to many, the term Lord is not meant to point only to Jesus’ deity. It is meant to convey the authority granted Him as the God-man, the Messiah. His authority is absolute. His authority is universal. His authority must be submitted to. The New Testament asserts that in the preaching of the gospel, God is commanding all men everywhere to repent. Why? Why command? Because Jesus is Lord. To deny the Lordship of Jesus in salvation is to deny the call and command of the gospel. Do you believe Jesus is Lord?

It means that at the heart of the gospel is Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He is the Messiah. He is at the center of what the Old Testament is about. He came as the Jewish Messiah. He came and, in every point, fulfilled what the Old Testament proclaimed, portrayed, prophesied and predicted. When we tell the gospel, we can tell the great, long story of the history of redemption. With the Biblically illiterate, we begin with creation. With the religious we can begin with Abraham. This is the pattern of New Testament evangelism. Do you believe that Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament?

It means at the heart of the gospel is the deity of Jesus. This is asserted over and over again. Jesus claimed it for Himself. The Apostles affirmed it for themselves. The Bible teaches it as absolutely required for ourselves. If you deny the deity of Jesus, that He is not only Divine, but that He is the Son of God, the second person of the Godhead, then you are not a Christian. Do you believe Jesus is God?

In one simple sentence Mark has begun the gospel. So here is the challenge for you this morning? Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God?

The Identification of the messenger (v. 2)

The gospel has the message about Jesus. But it also has a messenger.

John the Baptist is called the messenger. His role was ordained by God and predicted by the Scriptures. Mark identifies John by using the Old Testament. He is that messenger the Bible said would come when the Messiah came.

John the Baptist is sent to be the preparer of the way. He is sent with a purpose, an agenda, a job. He is to prepare the path for the Lord to walk. He did so through the ministry of his preaching.

John the Baptist is serving as the wilderness voice. This is an intentional strategy. John was calling people to repent. He was preaching, not in the cities, but out in the wilderness as an ascetic prophet. He was preparing the way for the Messiah.

No wonder then that we are sent as messengers as well. The gospel is to be proclaimed, preached, witnessed and spoken. It is to be lived – that is for certain. But the idea that people will be saved by merely observing your “gospel life” is nonsense. The message must be proclaimed. Saving faith and regeneration come through the Word that is heard. God brings Christians into existence by the Word just as God brought all creation into existence by His Word. We are messengers because God has ordained that regeneration and faith be given through the Word of God.

The Quotation from the Scripture (v.3)

When the New Testament quotes an Old Testament text, we should go back to the quoted text and read around it to understand more fully what the author was intending. Mark does the same with his use of Isaiah. Here is the extended quote from Isaiah 40:3–11

³ A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

⁶ A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades
when the breath of the Lord blows on it;
surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades,
but the word of our God will stand forever.

⁹ Go on up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good news;
lift up your voice with strength,

O Jerusalem, herald of good news;
 lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah,
 “Behold your God!”
¹⁰ Behold, the Lord God comes with might,
 and his arm rules for him;
 behold, his reward is with him,
 and his recompense before him.
¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
 he will gather the lambs in his arms;
 he will carry them in his bosom,
 and gently lead those that are with young.

The Proclamation of the Good News

Isaiah 40 is giving us the fuller ministry and message of the wilderness voice...

The Message...

The message concerns three important truths:

There will be a coming restoration of all things in a new creation. This anticipates all that the resurrection begins in this age and brings to completion in the age to come.

The glory of God will be revealed. This revelation will be very new in that it will be through a Person.

The frailty, sinfulness and futility of life apart from God is highlighted. This then is the basis for the call to repenting of sin and returning to the Lord.

The Messenger...

Why is there a messenger? This has always been God’s way. He has used people to speak and preach the message. Yes, He has used angels at certain points. All through the Old Testament, and now beginning in the New Covenant, God uses people as His messengers. This eventually leads us to the Great Commission.

The Meaning...

The Bible tells us what this means. We are not left to figure it out or to assign our own meaning to the message. When the message is given, God also has provided the authoritative understanding of that message.

The gospel at advent not only sends us to the nations, but also to our neighborhoods.

Reflect and Respond

A gospel to the neighborhoods strategy for 2019
- Pastor Tim Nixon, Pastor for Counseling and Outreach.

I heard the story once of a man who had a dream.

During his dream he saw hundreds of people drowning in the sea. A mother clutched a little girl, struggling to hold the child's head above the water. Nearby a wave washed over a man who was choking and struggling for air. All around, the ocean churned with drowning people, gasping for air and desperately trying to push their heads above the surface. They were alone in their terror with no help in sight.

Then a huge rock appeared, and a voice called to the people. They began swimming to the rock and crawling up its craggy sides to safety. But when they got to safety, something bizarre happened. The people who emerged from the sea got busy building rock gardens, listening to rock music, and going to rock meetings where they talked about the people who were still drowning. But nobody went back to the water's edge to help.

The picture is clear isn't it. The rock is the gospel. The voice is Jesus calling those who are perishing through the witness of his people. But look what happens when his people simply talk about the gospel.

Did you know that, on average, as few as 5%-10% of people in any church have shared the gospel in the past year? That means 90% have chosen the sin of silence.

Just like in the dream, those whom God has saved have gotten so busy and involved with the safety of the "Rock" they have forgotten to reach out to those who are still drowning.

I was saved as a twenty something.

I had heard the gospel many times. Through the years, many people came into my life and shared their faith, but I did not respond well. I sent them away, probably discouraged, because I rejected their message - and so they thought I had rejected them. They believed they had failed. And if they walked away believing they had failed, they believed a lie! I never forgot the words they spoke to me. I still remember their names and faces: Ron, Brad, Cindy, Roger, the guy on the street corner in downtown Dayton, Grant, Russ, Kelly, and Skip.

God is sovereign! If he can take someone like me and transform him, he can take anyone in your life and transform them.

But understand this - you are not responsible for causing a person's heart to turn to God. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (John 6:44). It is God who draws people to himself, not you. Even so, you never want to miss the opportunity God has placed before you to share the gospel with others. This is how God uses us to save others.

It would be really exciting if God had recorded for us all the people who he saved through the obedience of his messenger John the Baptist. And I think it might encourage us just as much if God had listed the names of all the people that he didn't save, who heard the gospel from John the Baptist. I imagine that second list to be much, much longer than the first. But we would never consider John the Baptist a failure.

You see, success is sharing the gospel and living your life for Jesus Christ.

It has nothing whatsoever to do with bringing anyone to the Lord.

It has everything to do with obedience. For God expects us to be messengers of the gospel as well as John the Baptist, Paul, Peter, even Philemon – to whom Paul wrote, “I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.” (Philemon 6).

Even if you do not have the privilege to see God call someone to salvation each time you share your faith, you have not failed, because you were obedient.

I want us to dust off the cobwebs and refocus our outreach in 2019.

I want to begin 2019 with a challenge for all at the Chapel.

I want us to personally share the gospel with 361 people in 2019. We can do that if 19 people will share the gospel with 19 other people next year.

Would you be 1 of 19 in 2019?

Consider the cost of your commitment. It will not always be easy. The writer of Hebrews said, “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:13). When we don’t sufficiently consider what God has done for us in Christ it is easy for us to lose heart in sharing the gospel. Instead of losing heart we must fan the flame of the gospel in our hearts and out of the overflow of the heart the mouth will speak (Matthew 12:34).