

The Path of the Gospel

Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 1:14-20

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I'm PD Mayfield, and someone poked fun at me last week because I said I'm one of the associate pastors. And just to clear things up, I'm the only associate pastor. I really appreciate the e-mail; I got a chuckle out of that.

If you have your Bibles with you or an iPad or your eyes to look at the projector or your ears to hear, we're going to be looking at Mark 1:14-20. So last week Pastor Randy began the *Gospel of Mark* looking at the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry, the beginning of Mark's Gospel. And this week we're going to be looking at the beginning of "The Path of the Gospel." What does it look like to follow Jesus? What does Jesus mean by the gospel of the kingdom? So we're going to be looking at the path that he calls us to, which is ultimately to himself. Let's read Mark 1:14-20.

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

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Let's pray together. Father, we are grateful for this time to come before you in worship and to sit at your feet and hear your word read. This account of Jesus's beginning of his ministry, his summary, his thesis, his invitation to repent and believe in and to follow him. Lord, may we have ears to hear and eyes to see. May we have your grace even now in this place, that you would grow us to live lives that are in step with your Son's life and his death and resurrection. Lord, grow our faith in your Son Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

In 2008 a very influential church in America—so when I say influential church in America, we [have] to think about concentric circles. It's not that influential, necessarily, in America, but in the spheres of the Christian church in America it has a very wide platform. And they came out with a statement there in right around 2008 time, where basically they said we have failed. You see, for over thirty years this church structured everything they did—from Sunday morning services to the programs through the services that are the kind of service teams that they had—everything they did was really around a single premise. And I'll quote one of the executive pastors. He said. "Participation is a big deal. We believe the more people participating in these sets of activities, with higher levels of frequency, it will produce disciples of Christ." So there in—I don't know how long the survey took—but there in their announcement there in 2008, their conclusion from this comprehensive survey of people in their church and people who had

left their church. The findings challenged their assumptions for how they were making disciples of Jesus.

After two thousand years people bring all sorts of assumptions to passages like we read this morning. Often those assumptions are appropriately informed by Scripture. We do have a good sense of what our mission is, what we should be doing to be making disciples. However, other times we can knowingly, but more often unknowingly impose our cultural sensibilities and our sense of tradition or our own expectations of what the Bible means in passages like today. Our assumptions are often reductions, they're distillations from our experience: things we've learned, people we've spent time around, and also from how we might have experienced our own growth as a Christian—how we came to know and believe Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, and how we grew in him. Those things inform how we then go back to passages like today and understand what it means to repent and believe in the gospel and the kingdom and 'Follow me.'

Today's passage, and the Gospel of Mark really overall, invites us on a path. This "Path of the Gospel" is to see Jesus for how he presents himself, by hearing him, watching him, pivoting our frame of reference from a frame of reference of self to a frame of reference to Jesus. And this path is what Christianity calls discipleship—the path of being a disciple, a learner, a student, a follower of Jesus Christ. So it really does, it behooves us to listen to Jesus himself talk about what his ministry was all about. And from this passage we can glean many things, but for today we'll talk about two main things. First the path of the gospel proclaims the kingdom of God, and then secondly we'll be looking at how the path of the gospel depends on following Jesus. The path of the gospel: **Proclaiming the Kingdom** and **Following Jesus the King**.

So first, **Proclaiming the Kingdom**. Look there at verse 14. We see, right out of the gates we see John has been arrested. Now your Bible may say something like he was put in prison. We'll learn in a couple chapters—Mark Chapter 6—more about that, those circumstances of how he came to be arrested. But for now Mark just kind of uses this ambiguous term. We know contextually he's in prison, but he's saying something. He's starting to give us clues about this gospel. You see, Mark uses a word that he uses nineteen times in the whole Gospel. It's a word that means 'delivered up' or 'handed over.' And so we see even out of the gates, going from John's ministry in the first thirteen verses to today, the beginning of Jesus' ministry—we hear Jesus's summary statement of his purpose, his mission.

And we see how there is also a foreshadowing of how their fates might actually intertwine. How Jesus's ministry—though distinct and unique—and as John said, he's pointing and preparing the way for the one to come. John says that. . . The Gospel of John says that John declares that he may increase so that I may decrease. So there's a transition happening in what God is doing in the world, and yet there is this foreshadowing of how it actually might be very similar.

So how does Jesus begin his public ministry? Well, Mark provides us the summary statement saying that Jesus came into Galilee and proclaimed the gospel of God. And so Galilee. Galilee. Galilee is the northern part of the nation of Israel at the time. It was what was left over from some of the exile from hundreds of years prior. When the Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered and people were displaced, some people remained in the land and others were taken away. And then after exile people came back into the land. And so we have this in the northern part, we have this kind of mixture of Israelites and Gentiles and sometimes those

things being kind of syncretistic and mixed together, leftovers from hundreds of years before. And then also more kind of Gentiles coming in, the Roman empire of the day. And so we see that he is in an area. We know also from other places that Galilee is actually the area that Jesus himself is from. He's from Nazareth. And the region of Galilee is not too much further north from where he grew up. So he goes into a place that he knows, to a culture that he knows, to proclaim the gospel of God.

Now the rest of the Gospel of Mark will unpack more and more of what Jesus is meaning here by the gospel, but here in these two verses, verse 14 and 15, it is this prophetic announcement of God's message, his message of good news. That's what gospel means: good news. Good news to the world. And this announcement is both from God and about God. There is something in that culture in that day that would have also been kind of known about gospel, even from the Greco-Roman world. You see, political leaders or military leaders would say. . . They would go around with, maybe, town heralds and 'proclaim a gospel.' They would make an announcement of Roman victory—the gospel, the salvation of Caesar—that there has been something—a land or people has been conquered—and this announcement is good news. So in this context there is this Greek and Roman idea mixed in with a very Jewish understanding of how God communicates. God brings a message of salvation, a message of good news to his people, of deliverance. It's both an announcement, a proclamation about God and from God.

So Jesus's ministry is about announcing to the world a message that is both from God and about God. And it's how Mark summarizes this message that's interesting. Verse 15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Boom, boom, boom. A summary statement, a three point outline, if you will, of Jesus's preaching ministry. So let's kind of look at these briefly. First, the timing involved. We see that the good news of the kingdom involves God's timing. "The time has been fulfilled." And what this is speaking to is the in-breaking of God's presence into the world. He is interacting and active, bringing his promises from the past into fruition, into the present. And you see the time of waiting is now over. Now there is an announcement of God's kingdom.

And that leads us to this second part that's tied very closely with it. The good news of the kingdom involves God's reign. For God, his kingdom isn't necessarily one of territory in the way nations often think of kingdoms and territory. But rather it's of God's loving rule in the hearts of his people. Where all of his creational purposes are living out; they're flourishing among the people and among the land. God's rule and God's reign is present. He is with his people. And the people are greatly benefiting from their God being with them.

And then thirdly, the good news of the kingdom involves God's invitation. The entrance to the kingdom and the path for living in the kingdom is summed up by these words: to repent and believe in the gospel. A lot of times [for] the gospel writers those go hand in hand. It's not necessarily two actions, it's really one action. Repent is merely pivoting. It's going in one direction and stopping and redirecting. That's repent. To repent is to move away from where you're going and move to somewhere else, and in this case, to someone else. One theologian writes of repentance this way. "If we look carefully at the New Testament concept of faith, which is the supreme requirement for redemption, we learn that godly repentance is an integral part of faith. If a person has faith but not repentance, that person does not have authentic faith. That person does not possess the necessary ingredients for redemption. Conversion is a result of faith and repentance."

That is true. If you have never repented and believed in the gospel of God, there has to be a first time of repentance. But this path of the gospel is for the Christian. Repentance and belief become a way of our living. Yes, we pivot from the way we were living to living to God once and for all, looking to the grace that [has] been so richly lavished upon us because of Jesus Christ's love for us. But that becomes our way of life: of constantly pivoting, constantly turning away from those things that take us away from the Lord and moving toward him. And that is coupled with belief in the gospel. Belief is not just, you know, our understanding about the gospel or things we know about God. Here it's so much more ingrained in who you are and what you do. It's who you place trust in. It's turning away from yourself and turning to Jesus. Trusting him. Trusting that his message is indeed good news.

On June 19, 1865, General Gordon Granger read an announcement to a group of people. Here's an excerpt of that announcement. "The people of Texas are informed that in accordance with the proclamation from the executive the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them becomes that between employer and hired labor." That was read on June 19, 1865—a message getting to Texans, who are on the outer fringes of the confederacy, of a message that was written September 22, 1862, which didn't go into effect until January 1, 1863. So here you are living in Texas, regardless of where you are in that position of relationship, and there is an announcement. There is a proclamation that becomes the rule of law, that becomes now how you now must live in society. There is a change by virtue of the announcement.

What are you going to do? Do you repent and believe? Do you turn away from how you were structuring your lives and now live in a new structure, in a new relationship, a new context for how society orders itself? Do you dismiss it? Do you rebel against it? What do you do when there is an announcement that has a moment that actually has a huge importance to the lives of everybody? How do you turn from how you've lived to a new way of living? Because there is the application of the proclamation. The truth by itself, the bare naked truth—it is true, it exists. But how then that applies to your life is a much more difficult process. Now I'm not presuming to say that the Emancipation Proclamation is on par with God's Word or that it's necessarily of the same equal equality of what Jesus is preaching. But it's pretty darn close. Not as God's word, but of importance. A proclamation issued that changes lives. What are you going to do? How does it change your life? How do you go back, go about, knowing how you used to live, and try to live in new ways. How do you move forward with the hopes of everything that is beautiful and glorious about that proclamation and then live another hundred years of not being fully fulfilled, much less more than a hundred years.

The gospel of the kingdom that Jesus brings is similar to that. It is something that was promised long ago. It is something that's been moving through time. God's deliverance. God's promise of his steadfast nature, his love, his faithfulness, his grace and mercy. We know of those things from Genesis onward. And time has now been fulfilled, that the kingdom of God is at hand. And what Jesus is saying is it is at hand because I am here. Now the time is fulfilled. All of God's promises are fulfilled. All of God's salvation is accomplished in me, in my words, in my life, in my sacrifice, in my resurrection. All of these things are in summary form right here at the beginning of Mark's Gospel, and he takes the rest of it to unpack that. So the gospel path that we're on involves proclaiming the king.

But it also depends upon **Following the King**. This is [verses] 16-20. Mark is giving us further clues about the intentions for Jesus's kingdom and his methods for its flourishing. You see, Jesus adjusts our expectations about what kind of Messiah he will be. He doesn't just plop into Israel and just say, *Hey, I'm the Messiah, and you should know what that means and what I mean by that. And so everything's going to be smooth sailing. Everything's going to work out really well.* No the people had cultural sensibilities and ideas and assumptions of what the Messiah was supposed to be. He was to be a political leader. He was to be a redeemer of the nation of Israel and kick out the oppressors, to bring salvation to the land so that the land and the people would flourish with their God. But Jesus adjusts our expectations. He gives an announcement—we just talked about that—this cosmic, monumental announcement.

But what does he do next? Verse 16. "Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee. . ." In our frame of reference and how we experience society and nations, what often happens, right? Our natural inclinations for a charismatic leader [is] to rise up, gather followers, gather momentum and head straight for the epicenter of whatever cause or territory [where] you're trying to usher in a new world order. Jesus is doing the opposite. He is going some eighty miles north of Israel's religious and political center. It's as if we rose up and said we're going to overthrow the United State of America, and instead of marching on Washington, we go hang out by the river near Newark, Delaware, and just start hanging out with some fishermen. It doesn't match. How do you proclaim this announcement and then—what seems to be such an odd thing to do—to go hang out with some fishermen. But Jesus is doing something. He's showing something. He's teaching us something about who he is and what he intends for his kingdom.

It's not about taking capitals or key military fortifications. It's not rearranging trade or infrastructure. It's about gathering the people of God. You see in the Old Testament nets and fish—that image, that metaphor—was often in the context of judgment. The prophets would speak about the nation of Israel being gathered up for judgment or even the surrounding nations being gathered up for God's judgment. And what we have here in Jesus's fulfillment—in some ways it is judgment, but it is a particular kind of judgment that is completely bound up in his grace and mercy. Instead of gathering people up for judgment, he's gathering people to experience life, to experience freedom, to experience going from stranger to friend, from rebel to reconciled, from a foreigner to a citizen. He's gathering people to be in his kingdom. And we need to be quick to listen and to watch what Jesus means by this kingdom.

And that's where we're going in this Gospel. We're going to see how he is ushering in with the demonstration of his authority, the demonstration of his powers, how he's going to be speaking about his kingdom more and more, and what he has to teach his disciples. So not only is he adjusting our expectations about what kind of Messiah he will be, he adjusts our expectations about what kind of disciples he calls. Again, it's a turnaround, it's a reversal of our expectations. He doesn't go for the best and the brightest; he goes for fishermen. There's things to glean and hear from these verses, you know, there's observations that we can make. That even within these first disciples that are called maybe some are more poor than others, some are casting nets on the sea shore. Others are in a boat and they have hired servants. So those things are reasonable observations to make. But what I want to focus on is that Jesus is about calling people to himself in a relationship.

The kingdom of God is at hand and I want you to be with me. To be near the kingdom, to be in the kingdom, is to be with Jesus, to be near Jesus, to know Jesus. That is his great act of his incarnation; [it] is that God is with us. God has taken on flesh. He has lived a life, a sinless life.

And he is communicating something about God's character and how he wants to redeem us, reconcile us back to himself so that we would be people in his kingdom, following him as our Messiah, our King.

I remember very clearly one day it was night. We were on a ski slope on a two-person chair lift, and we got stuck. And those are always fun times. You hope you can have a conversation. You know the person, maybe. Sometimes it can get awkward if you've never met the person. And you're up there and you're just kind of swinging back and forth, which is a great time to actually introduce yourself. But this particular opportunity I was with a friend. And in that stillness of the snow and in the quiet of the night, kind of in the trees, my friend just said: *You know that we've been talking over these last few months. And I've kind of been coming around different meetings, and I think I became a Christian.* All right, let's have a conversation about that. My friend was talking about this path of the gospel. He was coming in contact with Jesus—not because of me or not only because of me. This was a wonderful, beautiful endeavor of the body of Christ coming around people in relationship. That we're not creating a club for ourselves so that we can pat ourselves on our back, so that we can pretend to be better than we are, or also pretend that we're worse than we really are (that's just another form of pride). But actually we are coming together in a fellowship, in a community that's following our King, that's following Jesus. And my friend was witnessing that. He was seeing what Jesus was saying and doing in the Gospels. He was hearing from his friends. He was watching. He was exploring what Christianity was all about. And he comes to a point and he says: *I've got to turn from how I was living my life, and I've got to move toward Jesus.*

He's not. . . He's no longer just some dude in the Bible. He's not some good teacher, even. He's not some abstract moral philosophy. He's a person that makes himself known and declares that he is God in flesh. And he's going to demonstrate that with his miracles and his teaching in parables—those things that we're going to start walking through in the Gospel of Mark. But these are opportunities, as Mark unpacks these things, of what it means to be spiritually transformed and renewed from the inside out, as we watch and listen and follow Jesus Christ. David Benner says it this way: “Spiritual transformation involves the purification of sight. Jesus said that if our eye is healthy, our whole body will be full of light (that’s from Luke 11:34). We have to learn to see and accept what is really there. Stripping away our illusions is part of this process, as it reorients us toward reality. To see God as God is, not as who we want God to be, requires that we see ourselves as we actually are, for the same cloud of illusions obscures our view of both God and ourselves.”

The path of the gospel is this transformation of seeing God for who he is and seeing us for who we are. And that may be scary for some of you. That may be comforting for some of you. But the beauty of the gospel is that he is saying something true about who God is and who we are—desperately in need of a Savior, desperately needing a Messiah that's going to make everything right. It's going to be pushing back the curses of the fall. That's going to be turning the world upside down, not because he's going to capture Jerusalem and make it the nation of Israel in all of its glory, but he's going to renew it from the inside out, in every way it was supposed to be: a people in relationship with their God. And that relationship is meant for the whole world. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.” He gave his only Son. And that word—giving over, handing over, delivering up—we'll explore that more as we go along in the Gospel of Mark, because it's incredibly important. Because his ideas of what glory are radically challenge our assumptions of what glory is. The glory of ourself, the glory of our community, our reputation, who is the greatest. And Jesus is fundamentally at the core about making us the

way we are intended to be: truly human, fully human, in right relationship with each other and with our Creator and Redeemer.

So that survey I mentioned radically challenged their assumptions of what it meant for them to be making disciples. After thirty years they realized from the research that they actually weren't succeeding. This is one of the pastors in response to the research results. "Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into, thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back, it wasn't helping people that much. Other things that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for."

What Jesus is saying here in his summary statement, his introduction about proclaiming the kingdom of God and what it means to follow him, to literally get behind him and walk with him. Learn what he does. Watch what he says. Begin to take on those things, and go and do likewise. This is the path of discipleship that we're called to. And this path of discipleship, the path of the gospel challenges our assumptions. Thankfully the church that went through this process had the humility to turn from what they were doing and pivot and move in a different direction that actually sought to cultivate disciples of Jesus. And at the core of what that is it's repenting, turning from yourself, turning to Jesus, believing his proclamation, his announcement, his good news, and follow him.

That invitation is to you, even today. If that has never been done in your life, I invite you to repent. Repent of your sin, looking to Jesus, the only one that can forgive you fully, to wash you clean completely, and the one that renews you from the inside out fully. By the mercies of God hear God's message, his good news, to repent, to believe in Jesus and follow him. May we have eyes to see and ears to hear, whether that's for the first time or if that's something that you've been doing for decades as you follow Jesus. We're all on a path of the gospel, where God is making us more and more into his image. May he do that work in us.

Let's pray. God, would you do this work. Would you call us to faith. That people even in this room, people in our lives that may not be in this room, that you would reveal yourself. May your Gospel of Mark be one way that that happens as they explore and watch and observe who you are. Maybe they aren't ready to repent and believe, but they are listening and they want to follow and watch. May they, too, come to a place where they respond with faith. Father, grow our faith, grow our hope, as we fall more and more in love in you, as we follow you. In Jesus' name. Amen.