



## Unlikely Recruits

◀ Series: The Gospel of Mark • 3 of 3

5/13/2020 (WED) | Bible: **Mark 1:14-20**

Speaker:  
**Paul Forrest**

Today we're in Mark's first gospel, this time looking at verses 14 to 20.

The first thing we see as we come into this is the jailing of John the Baptist. After the baptism of Jesus, John had an encounter with Herod in which he accused Herod of sinfulness. There may have been other encounters between John and Herod and his wife. But certainly it caused enough offence that they had John thrown in prison.

This is always the case with the natural man. He does not like to be told about his sinfulness. And the usual reaction for one so told is firstly that they continue in their sin, and secondly that they turn against the messenger.

What a useful vessel John had been! And yet by the ordination of God he is silenced by being imprisoned. But also by the ordination of God, as one was silenced another one would rise up in his place. As John's ministry came to an end, Jesus' was just taking off.

It is possible that after Jesus' baptism there arose some persecution, and the jailing of John was perhaps an indication of this. And naturally speaking it may have been some elevated persecution that drove Jesus to return to his homeland of Galilee.

So he came into Galilee. And it says he was preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel."

So we have *repentance*. Now we've been looking at repentance in our Bible study. So I suspect that you will have quite recently looked into what repentance is. Perhaps you will have seen different aspects to it. The original word suggests a halting in your present career of sin in this life and a turning about to follow God's ways instead. There's fleeing from sin and following God.

And to the elect of God who have been given such a view of their sin and of God that they do so halt and turn around and repent, there is also a gift of *faith* in there. We may think that repentance and faith are separate aspects in conversion. And you may recall that there's a reference in scripture where it talks about "repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." However, you should not think that this is some kind of chronological order whereby God saves. You should think of repentance and faith as being two inseparable parts of the one process of conversion.

So there's repentance. And there must be belief in the *gospel*. There is the gospel. What does it mean to believe *in* or *on* the gospel of Jesus Christ? It certainly does mean that there must be a belief in the historical account. You must believe that Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he rose again on the third day also according to the scriptures. There must be that mental assent. There must be that belief that what happened was real. But more so, **there's an actual trust in the very man at the centre of that story:** Jesus himself. There's an understanding that this Jesus Christ took upon himself the sins of his people.

It is true that at Calvary Jesus died for many. He died for a multitude. But you should never forget brothers and sisters that he also died for **you**. We must not forget that your identity, your name, was not lost amidst that huge list of names for whom Christ died.

How could he forget you? Think on this: he had to be aware of *every sin* that you have ever committed. Aware that he was being punished for the lot. He knew you alright! Can you imagine what it would be like for anyone to mentally cycle through the sins of just one of us? Jesus did that. And he did it again...and again...AND AGAIN...FOR THE GREAT MULTITUDE THAT NO MAN CAN NUMBER, even all the elect of God.

And for them, he was willing to go and place himself in the hands of those who arrested him, knowing that he would suffer a cruel and horrific death. And more than that, HE WAS PLACING HIMSELF IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY GOD AND SUFFERING THE VENGEANCE OF THAT GOD AGAINST THE SINS OF HIS PEOPLE.

This gospel is sometimes called "The gospel of Christ", "The Gospel of Jesus Christ", "The Gospel of God" and "The gospel of the kingdom". And here it is "The gospel of the kingdom of God".

We should firstly define what this kingdom is. Well, what *is* a kingdom? A kingdom has, if you like, three elements to it:

- **A kingdom has a king.** He rules. And for us it is the King of Kings, the ruler of this whole world, God Almighty, "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God".
- **A kingdom also has subjects.** A kingdom must have subjects for that king to rule. Who are the subjects of the King of Kings? **It is none other than his church.** We are his subjects. The people in the world maybe under the general lordship of God, but they are not described as being citizens of God's Kingdom.
- **The third element of a kingdom is laws.** The laws are if you like the mechanism by which the king interacts with his subjects. It is the king's job not only to create the laws but to see to it that they are obeyed. And our God is a lawgiver. And as the King of Kings, he has the right to institute laws that are temporary in nature—laws that apply to one group only. And this he has done in the past. BUT ALL THAT WAS TO GIVE WAY TO A LAW THAT WOULD LAST FOREVER. A LAW THAT WAS APPROPRIATE FOR A KINGDOM THAT WAS EVERLASTING.

And in a way the law for us is quite simple. The law lays down a few principles. Firstly, that we should love God. Secondly, that we should love others. And the refinement of that second law is that we should have a special love for the brethren.

So a kingdom has a king, it has subjects and it has laws.

And this kingdom is manifested in the present and in the future. It is not as some believe only in the future. If you read the references to the to the kingdom in the Bible, you will see this very clearly. So we can say that when God reveals himself to the unbeliever and draws them in and it takes him and escorts him through the gates of the Kingdom, **that is our conversion**. Our conversion.

And we remain as his subjects throughout our Christian lives. And when that day comes, that day that we must face, when we meet with death, we have a great promise. We have a promise that for the believer, the one who dies in Christ, **THEY WILL BE RAISED AGAIN ON THAT RESURRECTION DAY**. They will emerge into a new and beautiful and perfect environment created by God for his people, for his subjects, to live in for all eternity.

But what of those outside the kingdom? What of those who are aliens to the Commonwealth of God? They too will live their lives. They too will die. They too will be resurrected. Except that it is called a **“resurrection to damnation”**. They will be judged. They will be declared guilty. They will have to acknowledge their absolute guilt. They will have to confess that all that God is about to throw at them is only their just desserts. And those people will *also* enter a new environment. it is a place of darkness. A place of despair. And if by virtue of them sharing the planet with God's people they enjoyed some of the good things that come from God—maybe love, family, happiness and perhaps even a sense of purpose—all those will be **stripped away**. They will be naked and ashamed and have nothing but misery ahead of them.

Friends my heart aches when I share the gospel with people and meet with indifference. I marvel that this proposition of forgiveness of sins and eternal life is not attractive to every man woman and child who exists on this planet! I am *stunned*. All those benefits being just a prayer away, yet rejected. And what more evidence do we need that salvation is of the Lord? Because those people are **spiritually dead**. They cannot even do that one thing and sincerely go to God in prayer, in repentance, to receive that forgiveness and that gift of eternal life. That's their condition.

And then, as I shake my head with frustration, as I find myself *angry* at people for being so hard and downright *stupid* if I may say so...**it's then I realize that, but for the grace of God, I would be exactly the same**. God help you not to look down on people, no matter how wicked, because *you could have been* that person. The seeds of all manner of unspeakable evil lie within each of us. It's only by God's grace they're not expressed.

This Kingdom: let me say one more thing about it. “The kingdom is at hand”. It was coming. The Jews expected a kingdom of God to be instituted that was more material in nature. The Messiah would come, overthrow the Roman oppressors, vindicate the Jews and exalt them to be rulers over the dogs of mankind.

How utterly tragic and ironic that the Messiah that they had waited thousands of years for was the one who came in power and glory, using the agency of pagan armies, to DESTROY Jerusalem and DESTROY their temple, the very place where God came and met man.

We're in a *spiritual* kingdom. One that will last forever. It says here in Daniel chapter 2 and verse 44: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. And the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

If we come back to our text, we see that Jesus has this meeting with four people. Simon and Andrew, who were brothers, then James and John, who were also brothers. It so happens that these four were in business together. They were business partners. And they were fishermen. We suspect they were not highly educated.

I've often wondered whether I would like to be a fisherman. I like the sea and I like boats. But it is a hard job. It could be hard even on this lake. The Sea of Galilee was just a lake, and yet it had its own weather system that could produce storms. So it's dangerous.

It is the case that people who are academically gifted and become highly educated are very unlikely to become fishermen. The more education someone gets, the more doors open for them. They have more choices. Had these men be highly educated, they could have found other types of work that were a lot better paid, a lot less dangerous and a lot less smelly!

We see in Jesus early life that the common shepherds were the ones to receive the good news from the angels that the king had come. And here Jesus recruits his first disciples from amongst fishermen. Why?

Let me read from First Corinthians chapter 1 verses 27 and 28. It says, "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, and base things of the world and things which are despised hath God chosen; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought the things that are."

I will say that although Jesus used these common working men in his ministry, we're not to think that God had a problem with people who were educated. Other apostles *were* educated. But these are included to show that God can use anyone. That whatever background they have, **he will equip them.**

We should be just as thankful for the educated Christians down in centuries as we are for the poor, common, uneducated ones that God used. In God's wisdom, he raised up men and gave them an ability in learning that was greater than normal. Christians in the past have spent decades of their lives in study, producing commentaries, books and Bible translations. And we are as thankful for that great legacy as we are for God's use of the common people like these fishermen.

I want to quickly mention that in verse 20, it's said when James and John left their father to follow Jesus that they left him with the hired servants. So we're not to think that this family was especially poor. The business was doing well enough to employ people.

As I read this passage, I began to imagine Jesus coming today rather than back then. I imagine Jesus coming and it being announced that he would be recruiting some disciples. I can imagine hundreds of preachers around the country mentally preparing themselves just in case they were chosen. Getting their suits out of the wardrobe. And they would in their heads run through what they were going to say if Jesus came and chose them. Some of these men might be ones who've written many books and are very highly regarded.

And then they hear some news. They hear the shocking news that Jesus the previous day had already recruited all his disciples. And I can imagine all these men wondering who the people were who were chosen. And to their amazement, they discover that Jesus has been down to the local dockyard, found some men on their lunch break and said "Follow me"— bypassing, in our view, all the best candidates!

In a sense, this is what happened in our account. In choosing for his first disciples such, if you like, working class men, he bypassed ones who were, humanly speaking, better candidates. BECAUSE HE WAS GOING TO TAKE THE WEAK THINGS OF THIS WORLD AND CONFFOUND THE THINGS WHICH ARE MIGHTY.

Do you not remember last week? We said that Jesus, in setting up his temptation, saw to it that all the conditions were in place for his **failure**. His weakness. The harsh environment. They were all in place to make it likely that he would fail when the tempter came. But he was victorious. And this made the victory all that much greater! This is how God works.

I want to make the point here that we're not so think that these four men had some kind of blind faith, whereby some man turned up and said "Follow me" and they just abandoned their whole lives and followed him—a blind faith in an absolute stranger. I'm not disputing that by some special miracle of God, he could have done that. But this is not what he did. These men *already knew* Jesus.

If you have a look in the first chapter of John, you'll hear these names mentioned. You'll see that they had already attached themselves to Jesus and seen him perform miracles even. And then when Jesus comes to the shores of the Sea of Galilee, we elsewhere read that he climbs into a boat and instructs them to throw the nets in. And they gather up such a weight of fish that it almost sinks the boats. And it is *after that long process* that he says, "Follow me". And they go from a part-time ministry to a full-time one.

The point is there was knowledge involved. There was knowledge involved in their decision to follow him.

That gradual introduction into the ministry for them is similar to what we see with Jesus. You remember how we said that he lived all those years in obscurity then was baptized. There was some ministry around Judea and then it back up to the quiet country to spend some time in Galilee again. Eventually the times comes, and he goes and starts to recruit those disciples as full-time workers for him. This is how he works.

Having said all that, that they knew him, it was still an act of obedience and it was still an effectual call. You must consider that these disciples had no idea not only who Jesus really was but also the future that lay ahead of them—the good *and* the bad. They didn't know

that they would suffer persecution for what they taught. They didn't know that some of them would actually have to give their lives for the gospel. Neither did they know of all the great blessings of being around Jesus, seeing his miracles and receiving eternal life. What an amazing time they had ahead of them!

They get up and follow him. And remember this was their source of income. And they left it. Later, Peter is speaking to Jesus, and it's recorded in Luke's gospel chapter 18 and verses 28 to 30. "[Peter said] 'Lo we have left all and followed thee.' And he [Jesus] said unto them, 'Verily I say unto you: there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake who shall not receive manifold more in this present time and in the world to come life everlasting.'" And so we step out in faith as we serve God, and we look forward to those immeasurable rewards that God has prepared for us.

You will see that Jesus tells these new disciples that they are to become "fishers of men".

**Evangelists.** And it may have occurred to you that he did not say, "Follow me, and I will make you great theologians", as good as that might be. He did not say, "Follow me, and I will make you well renowned preachers". He says, "Follow me, and **I will make you fishers of men.**" *You'll go fishing after men*, these disciples were being told. They were being recruited chiefly to cast out the net of the gospel and let God do his work.

And in the same way that God brought those fish miraculously into the location of the fishermen's nets on that day, so it is that GOD MIRACULOUSLY ORDAINS THAT ALL HIS ELECT WILL COME INTO THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME TO BE CAUGHT IN THE GOSPEL NET.

Winning souls. It says here in Proverbs 11 and verse 30, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he that winneth souls is wise." In Daniel chapter 12 and verse 3, we read: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever."

Friends, some of you might think that you are not cut out for this. This is not your calling, to be a fisher of men. And I would say that you are **wrong**. God has given you both the message AND the means to be Fishers of Men.

The message is the very gospel you have all professed to be the means by which God saved you. And as for the means of sharing this gospel, you simply have to communicate with other human beings the same way as you have been doing all your lives!

- Talking to them in person
- Chatting on the phone
- Writing letters or sending greetings cards
- Composing emails
- Posting on social media
- Texting people

Should I go on? You MOST CERTAINLY have the message that you need, and you MOST CERTAINLY have the means to communicate with people.

Jesus, in recruiting you, is telling you that you are to be Fishers of Men. And so we cast our nets. In whatever way we can, we cast our gospel nets out. And we may bring them in continuously empty. Month after month, year after year. But it is not our business to be anxious about whether the net is empty or full. We're told our job is to cast the net out! And we really have no right to the wonderful privilege, the blessing, that it is to see souls come into the kingdom.

Having said that, the Bible is full of encouragement for you that IF YOU SOW LIBERALLY YOU WILL ALSO REAP LIBERALLY by seeing fruit for your labours. So I urge you to go on in the confidence that if you sow the seeds of the gospel abundantly you will be blessed. And who knows whether God will use you to draw in one of his elect into his kingdom!

I know friends that the presentation of the gospel to the world is a stench of decay in their nostrils. If God's grace is absent, people will just run away from the voice of the shepherd.

I remember our brother Don Fortner, who died recently, using this term: that God "sweetly forces" people into the kingdom. I don't use that term, but we know what he means. God comes to save a sinner with an attitude of **love**. And he has to employ **force** because the sinner is in rebellion against him.

If we were to describe conversion more specifically, we would add that what *looks* like force is this: God does not force people to trust in Jesus against their will. He *changes* their will so that they *want* to trust in Jesus.

And no man who came to Jesus ever looked back and complained that they were forced! Even if it *was* bare force, anyone redeemed from sin would still thank God. We thank God for that loving intrusion into our lives where he came and HE CAST OUT THE DEMON OF REBELLION AND INDEPENDENCE OF GOD. And there we sat afterwards. Quiet. Clothed. And, like that Gadarene demoniac, in our right mind.

God calls us effectually. Thank God it IS effectual. Thank God he does not see us kicking and screaming and leave us in our sinful tantrum and leave us to a fate of destruction.

I would encourage you, in closing, to consider this: have you left all? Have you left *all* for Jesus? No one, not even God, is asking you to abandon your legitimate responsibilities. Christians who forsake the means by which God sustains people, i.e. their work, and say that they are to live "a life of faith" are **mistaken**. God expects you to carry out your duties to your family and in your job in a way that honours him.

But as much as you are able, **you are to serve him**. Have you at least mentally, have you at least *in your heart*, left all to follow him? Do you hold the things of this world lightly? HAVE YOU LEFT ALL FOR HIM?

I pray he will enable you to do this, as you spend your lives in his kingdom. Not merely as subjects, but also as **heirs**.

Amen.