

## **The Call of the Gospel**

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The Gospel of Mark: Mighty and Mild / Mark 1:14-20

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### **Introduction:**

When is the last time you considered the call of the gospel on your life? Maybe you are thinking, “What do you mean the call of the gospel on my life? I thought the gospel was something I believe in.” The gospel is truths that you believe in. The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, the righteous Son of God, the eternal King, took on flesh, died in our place, bearing the just payment for our sins on the cross, and rose again, triumphant forever over the enemy, so there would be no condemnation for those who believe, and instead everlasting joy basking in the glory of God. Those are important truths to believe in, but if you truly believe in the gospel, if you have truly placed your trust in Jesus Christ, you should know that Jesus, and the truths of the gospel demand something of your life. What they demand is a change of priorities. They call for a willingness to deny yourself and live for the glory of another. Our passage today, in Mark 1:14-20, reminds us of this as we hear Jesus proclaiming the gospel, calling all who hear to repent and believe, followed by Mark quickly relaying a series of scenes that draw out the call of the gospel and some shocking responses from those who first heard that call. Before we dive in, it’s valuable to remind ourselves of what Mark has shown us up to this point. Mark began this gospel by revealing that Jesus is the promised Messiah and that His coming fulfilled prophecies which spoke of the Lord Himself coming to rule the nations. We have seen how John the Baptist went before Him to prepare the way, pointing to someone mightier coming. We saw that Jesus is the one to come, and the steps He went through to identify with us in our weakness and fulfill all righteousness through His baptism and temptation in the wilderness. We heard the voice of God announcing His pleasure in Christ, as God the Son, and considered why the Spirit rested on Him. And we saw how these things pointed to the truths of the gospel, as they revealed Jesus as the spotless sacrificial lamb of God. Our passage today follows all of this and serve as the first moments in the ministry of Jesus, before we see Him perform any miracles or provide any teaching. And it confronts us with the call of the gospel, causing us to consider our response to it before he begins to reveal the depths who Jesus Christ is and what He has done. Begin with me, in verses 14-15, where Mark has us first consider

### **THE CALL OF THE KING**

Note the simplicity of Mark’s narration in verse 14, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.” Short and sweet. John’s arrested, Jesus came, and Jesus preached. Yet, we see a few things here. One is how Jesus’ ministry didn’t begin until after John was arrested. This is the final confirmation that John was the voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for Jesus, as God the Son, to come. And we are meant to sense that Jesus was intentionally delayed until the ministry of John the Baptist was fulfilled. Another thing to note is that Jesus came into Galilee, not Jerusalem. If you were here last week, you will remember the insignificance of Galilee for the Jewish people. However, for Mark, Galilee serves as a significant place. The first half of this gospel is centered around Jesus’ ministry in and around Galilee. Galilee is also where Jesus tells His disciples to meet Him after he is raised in Mark 14:28 and where the angel tells the women at the tomb to remind the disciples to go to meet Jesus. Through this letter, we will see Galilee as a place of gospel advancement, compared to Jerusalem as a place of controversy and unfaithfulness. The last thing we note in this verse is how Jesus was “proclaiming the gospel of God.” “Proclaiming” is the same word used in verse 4 where we see John “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” linking Jesus’ ministry with the message of John. It is also the word used in the Greek translation of Isaiah 61:1 and Joel 2:1 that prophetically speak of the day of the Lord and coming reign of God. This begins a connection Mark wants to make to these concepts that continues throughout this passage. Follow these connections as he discloses Jesus’ proclamation.

Start at the end of verse 14, Jesus was “proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” Consider three parts to this. First, “The time is fulfilled.” In this statement, Jesus draws attention to His ministry as a specific and important moment in history. He is fulfilling the prophetic expectation of Israel because He is the anointed Messianic King. Secondly, Jesus says, “and the kingdom of God is at hand.” Some translations say, “has come near.” There is a question to ask. Is Jesus speaking of something yet to happen in the future? Or something present? There are debates among scholars about this. The question is how this should be understood within the framework of the first-century Jewish expectation of an earthly kingdom of God. If the kingdom of God is only an earthly kingdom, then Jesus must be speaking of something yet to happen. The problem with this understanding is that it misses the intentional language by Mark that consistently points to a present spiritual reality, not a future, earthly one. Mark opened by clearly showing that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and God the Son who came to fulfill prophecies of God’s reign over the nations. We are going to see the phrase “kingdom of God” mentioned fourteen times throughout this gospel, and all except possibly two at the end point to a present reality of the kingdom. Further, as commentator James Edwards points out, when Jesus speaks of the kingdom in Mark, “he speaks of entering the kingdom as entering a new state of being,” not moving into a physical reign of God. For Mark, this is a present reality. However, this doesn’t deny a future physical reign of God and must be balanced with other scriptures that speak clearly of that when Jesus returns. The best way to understand what Jesus means when He says, “the kingdom of God is at hand,” is to recognize that Jesus coming as the King, inaugurates God’s reign over the hearts of people, while pointing to a future consummation of that reign eternally when He returns. The kingdom of God is both “already” and “not yet.” With this part of His proclamation, Jesus confronts all who hear with God’s reign over their lives as we see Him arriving as the King of the Kingdom. Therefore, this is a call that needs to be dealt with now, bringing us to the third part of this proclamation. Look at the end of verse 15, “repent and believe in the gospel.” See the connection to John’s message with the call to repent. A call we saw two weeks ago means to turn away from sin, as a willful and conscience act. But notice the call of Jesus goes one step further, calling us to “believe in the gospel.” Where repentance speaks of what we turn from, belief speaks of what we turn to. Don’t miss this, because the call of the king is not only to turn from your sin, but to turn to something else. And both words, in the Greek language, signify a continual action. Continue repenting and believing in the gospel. This statement is a summary of everything we will see in this letter. It is a call to believe in the person of Jesus Christ. To believe in His authority and power that see exercised over and over again as we move forward. To believe in what He accomplished by suffering for His people, believing that He is your only hope to enter the kingdom. Believing that He made a way for the forgiveness of your sin, turning from it and to Him. The call of the King, the call of the gospel is for a complete and radical change, a change that begins now and will be fully experienced in the consummation of His kingdom. Hear the call of the king, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” The next section of our passage highlights the change called for, where Mark moves us to think on

## **RESPONDING TO THE CALL OF CHRIST**

Notice how verse 16 links this section to verses 14-15, “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.” Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God, and the narrative thrusts us into a scene taking place “alongside the Sea of Galilee.” Mark points to two brothers working within their occupation. “They were fisherman,” who were “casting a net into the sea.” We should note some things about this trade. Commentaries all point out how fish were a major commodity in the Greco-Roman world and the fish from this sea were highly sought after in both Egypt and Syria. Also, the Jewish historian Josephus speaks of 230 boats from the Sea of Galilee being used in war around this time. This was a significant trade to be working in.

Now, notice what happens next in verses 17-18, “And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Jesus comes, Jesus calls, Simon and Andrew immediately leave and follow. Keep going in verses 19-20, “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. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.” Do you see the similarities? Jesus comes, sees James and John working their trade, Jesus calls, and James and John immediately leave and follow. Mark focuses on both sets of brothers responding instantly and entirely to draw our attention to how they responded to the call of Christ. But, before we look more closely at what their responses show us, let’s consider the call. Look again at verse 17, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” Note two things within this call. First, the uniqueness of Jesus’ call of “Follow me.” It is well recorded how unique it was for a Rabbi, or teacher, to do this. For one, students always asked to follow Rabbi’s, not the other way around. Another unique aspect of this is how Rabbis primarily called students to follow the Law, or Torah, not themselves. Yet, Christ says “Follow me.” The call is connected to the authority of Christ alone. I love how Danny Akin points out what Mark has shown us about Jesus leading up to this call, “This One we are called to follow is the Christ (1:1), the Son of God (1:1), the Lord (1:3), the mighty One (1:7), the worthy One (1:7), the One who baptizes with the Holy Spirit (1:8), the Spirit-anointed One (1:10), the beloved Son (1:11), the One who pleases God (1:11), and the One who brings the kingdom of God (1:15).” (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2014), Mk 1:17–20.) No wonder we are called to follow Him. Just look at who He is! And we will see more. We will see His awe-inspiring teaching, His special authority, His power over nature, demons, and sickness. Church, think of these things as you hear Him say, “Follow me.” The second thing we see within this call, is that it called the disciples to a specific task, “and I will make you become fishers of men.” Most only link this to their trade as fisherman, but I agree with commentators who suggest Mark is likely making another connection here. The concept of fishing for men is found often in Old Testament prophecy as God’s declaration of Him sending fishers to catch men for judgment. If you want to study further, you can find this in Jeremiah 16, Ezekiel 29, Amos 4, and Habakkuk 1. Jesus likely links to this idea, but turns it on its head, because the disciples save people from judgment rather than gathering them for it. This link shows the urgency and importance of the call. And church, this is the call of the gospel for all of us. Remember, it is turning from our sin and to Christ. And turning to Christ means following Him wherever he may lead. Now, let’s consider what the details Mark gives show us. Did you notice how verses 18 and 20 are almost identical with a call and immediate response, but Mark records different things that each set of brothers left? I see these showing two changes that come from truly following Jesus. First,

### **1) WE DISCOVER A GREATER PURPOSE**

Pay attention to what Mark records in verse 18, he says, “And immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Mark points to them leaving their trade and livelihood. There is good reason to believe Simon and Andrew were successful businessmen if they were able to compete in the market there. By connecting this response directly to Jesus’ call to make them become fishers of men, he emphasizes how Simon and Andrew saw following Jesus as a greater purpose than building a successful business. Note the costs involved in this decision. Simon and Andrew were in the middle of their trade, casting nets and catching fish. They had a tangible representation in front of them of the success of their labor. I personally like to picture them with nets in hand full of fish. Jesus comes and calls, saying He will make them become fishers of men. They look down at their nets full of fish, and up at Jesus. Down at their nets, and back up at Jesus. They have a choice to make in that moment. Now, to be clear, we don’t know if they had fish in their nets, but you can see the question they faced. Do they trust in the tangible evidence of their current purpose? They were fisherman.

Or do they throw all of that aside and follow this man with the hope of doing something else? Becoming fisher of men. There is an immediate cost of discipleship that calls them to leave what they know behind to follow Jesus in faith. And I believe this is meant to help us see this cost of following Jesus that resounds throughout this gospel. Here, we see 2 men leave their nets. In chapter 2, Levi leaves his tax booth. The rest of the twelve are called in chapter 3, and Peter says, on behalf of the apostles, in Mark 10:28 “See, we have left everything and followed you.” The call of Christ is to follow Him and see the goal of saving others and making disciples as a greater purpose than anything else you put your hand to. Simon and Andrew model that change for us here. Have you responded to the call to follow Jesus in this way? It may not mean leaving your vocation, but are you so tied up in your vocation that you have no time to follow Jesus and make disciples? The second change that happens for those who truly follow Jesus is that

## **2) WE FIND A HIGHER VALUE**

Look at what Mark records James and John left to follow Jesus in verse 20, “And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.” Even though Mark doesn’t mention what Jesus says, the flow of this passage shows that James and John received the same call as Simon and Andrew. Where Simon and Andrew left their nets, James and John left their father and the hired servants. There is an intentional progression of sacrifice by Mark here. Simon and Andrew needed to step out in faith and leave their profession for a greater purpose. James and John needed to leave their father and the hired servants for a higher value. You see, family was extremely valued within first-century Judaism. Honor of parents within the family was huge. Following in the trade of your father was almost a must. Their call was to value Christ and the kingdom more than family. Further, the description of leaving hired servants likely points to the value of the family business. They were possibly set for life in this trade. Not only that, but consider the additional financial burden placed on the family business with two sons walking away from it. Their father would have to hire more servants to help him. Do you see the significant shift of what was most valuable for them? And again, don’t miss this was so that they would become something. The call of Christ may not mean you need to leave your family, but if it did, would You see Christ and His kingdom as a higher value for you?

### **Conclusion:**

Jesus proclaims the call of the gospel, then calls four men who were deeply involved with family, and their livelihoods to leave everything and follow Him. And by showing their immediate response, Mark beckons us to consider our response to the call of Jesus. Church, the significant challenge we face in responding rightly to this passage, is the challenge to not brush this passage off as just a call and response the apostles heard and made. I don’t believe Mark gives us the chance to do that. Within the story that shifts Mark’s portrait of Jesus from the mighty Son of God to the suffering Son of God, where we see Peter’s confession and rebuke at the end of chapter 8, Jesus calls the crowd and his disciples together, saying this in Mark 8:34, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” This is the true call of the kingdom of God, to follow Jesus wherever He may lead. To deny ourselves, and sacrifice whatever keeps us from living for the sake of His kingdom and glory. Church, we need to understand that sin is more than just doing wrong things, the root of sin is denying God’s rule over our lives and seeking other things over God. Sometimes the things we seek over God are good things in our lives. The call of Christ says to look at our hearts and ask if Jesus Christ is the one we are truly looking to. Or does anything else sit on the throne of our heart? As Pastor David and the worship team are coming to lead us in responding to God’s Word, ask yourself if there is anything you are placing as a greater purpose or higher value than Christ in your life. Are you holding onto vocational purpose over seeking first His kingdom? Are you seeking your satisfaction more in what you accomplish on this earth, than what you do for the glory of God? Is your love of your livelihood, family, or friends greater than your love for Christ? Maybe one of these things has been what is keeping you from turning to Christ for your salvation. Repent and believe today in Jesus Christ.

Maybe some of these things have been getting in the way of loving Christ with all your heart, soul, and mind. Bring those things before Him today. Repent of seeking joy and satisfaction outside of the living water He provides. Believe that He is your all-satisfying treasure and follow Him. Respond to God's Word as the Spirit leads. Pray where you are or come and kneel before Him. Confess your sin and sing of His grace for your own heart and those around you. We also have people who are ready to pray for you and with you if that is desired. They will be standing in the corners up front and at the bottom of the stair in the back, wearing lanyards so you can easily identify them. Come and have the Lord care for you through their prayers. Have the Word of God do its work in our hearts and press into this time of response as a means of receiving God's grace for you today.

Pray together with me as we respond to the Word.