

A MODEL FOR MINISTRY

Mark 1:14-20

August 20, 2006 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

As I was leaving our subdivision yesterday I noticed the following announcement on a church's sign, "Kiss the pig contest – You pick the winner." On my blog this week I posted a sign from another church that advertised, "Clown-led Worship." A church in Birmingham last year had a series of sermons entitled, "The Gospel According to Jimmy Buffet."

I could give any number of illustrations like this that would send shivers up the spine anyone who is serious about the ministry of the gospel. We must stop and ask ourselves, "What is the purpose of such ministries? Are they seeking to find favor with God or with man?" I don't think that these questions are unreasonable. Jesus gave the believer a clear mandate, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:19-20). And yet, ministries like these continue to give the idea that the gospel needs a little help. The gospel is not interesting enough for the unbeliever, so they dress it up a little. But in doing so, they make a mockery of the gospel. Their "teaching" goes beyond what Jesus taught and what we find in Scripture.

In our text this morning, we see a biblical model for ministry born out in the ministry of Christ. We have seen in the beginning of our study in Mark that God had carefully prepared for the day that Jesus would arrive on the scene. He sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Messiah (1:2-8). We then saw the initiation of Jesus' ministry both in the affirmation of the Father and the Spirit at His baptism (1:9-11) and His further preparation for ministry in His temptations in the wilderness (1:12-13). In these verses, Jesus begins His work of the ministry. And what we see in Jesus' first actions are the key to a ministry that is faithful to the gospel, *faithful preaching that produces faithful followers.*

I. Faithful Preaching (1:14-15)

Mark tells us that the impetus for Jesus' ministry in Galilee was John's imprisonment. He does not give the details of John's arrest nor does he tell of the outcome here, but gives a full account later in 6:14-29 where King Herod hears of Jesus popularity and is afraid that John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, had risen from the dead. All that Mark tells us here is, "**after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee.**"

We know from John 3 and 4 that Jesus ministered in Judea prior to coming to Galilee for a period of at least a year. Mark does not share anything of this prior ministry but emphasizes that John the Baptist had to leave the scene before Jesus ministry began in full in Galilee. This takes place with John's arrest. With John being "**taken into custody,**" the time of preparation had ended. The time of fulfillment had come. It was time for the Messiah to begin His work. Mark tells us that Jesus began His ministry with what is crucial to any gospel ministry, "**Jesus came... preaching.**" But it is not just *that* He preached that is significant, but *what* He preached. There are three things we note concerning the preaching of Jesus that are foundational to our work in the ministry.

1. It's purpose (v. 14b)

Jesus came preaching "**the gospel of God.**" Mark opened this gospel with, "**The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.**" There we noted that the heart of the gospel is

Jesus Christ. Jesus' preaching "**the gospel of God**" does not contradict the truth that the gospel is "the gospel of Jesus Christ," but affirms it. Jesus came proclaiming the gospel of which God is both the subject and the object; the gospel is *about* God and *from* God. In other words, "Jesus came heralding or proclaiming the good tidings of salvation as God's free gift to men, a salvation which from start to finish is God's work" [Hendriksen, *Mark*, 56]. Jesus' will was to do the work of the Father for the glory of the Father. So He comes proclaiming "**the gospel of God**" as the source and object of the gospel so that the Father alone would be glorified.

But this does not distort or change the content of the gospel in any way. Jesus Christ is central to the gospel because that is the way God planned it. Jesus' will was to accomplish the salvation that God had ordained before the foundation of the world for His people. It is God's gospel that Jesus accomplished in redemptive history. So "**the gospel of God**" and "**the gospel of Jesus Christ**" are the same. Jesus' proclamation of "**the gospel of God**" emphasizes the truth that God initiated all of redemptive history that comes to fruition and culminates in Jesus Christ. We see this initiation of God in redemption plainly born out in Scripture.

In Genesis 3:15 we have what is known as the *protoevangel*, the first gospel. Immediately on the heels of the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve, and the consequent judgment of God for their sin, God gives the following pronouncement, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel."

Everything else we see in the Old Testament, God's choosing men and a people for Himself, God's covenants, God's giving of the Law, God's sacrificial system and priestly arrangement, God's order of kings and prophets all point to the salvation provided in and through His only Son Jesus Christ alone, the true Prophet, Priest and King.

When we come to the New Testament, we see God's initiation even more clearly.

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world, that *He gave* His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Romans 8:3-4 – For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us.

2 Corinthians 5:21 – He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Ephesians 2:8 – For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God.

These verses demonstrate that "**the gospel of God**" was accomplished through the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus came to this earth and this is the gospel that Jesus proclaimed. He came to secure salvation for the people of God.

This is the gospel that we are to preach today. The Reformers gave their lives in the fight for the gospel that had been diluted by the Church. The *five sola's* that were born out of the Reformation serve as a good reminder of the content of "**the gospel of God.**" Salvation is according to *Scripture alone* through *faith alone* in *Christ alone*. But it comes only by God's *grace alone* for *the glory of God alone*. It is God's gospel.

2. It's focus (v. 15a)

Mark then shares the very first spoken words of Jesus in this gospel, "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.**" With these words Mark provides the focal point of Jesus'

message, **“the kingdom of God.”** When we think of the word **“kingdom”** we often think of a geographical area over which a king or monarch rules. But this only partially defines what **“kingdom”** means in Scripture. While the word does refer to a king who rules, and a realm as well, it is a totally different realm. It is not a geographical domain but a spiritual domain, the reign of God over His people and His world. As Sinclair Ferguson points out, “That rule was exercised wherever God was present. The Old Testament revelation had led people to believe that one day God would establish that reign personally” [*Let’s Study Mark*, 10]. The Old Testament revelation to which Ferguson refers is found in Isaiah 40:9-10, ⁹ “Get yourself up on a high mountain, O Zion, bearer of good news, lift up your voice mightily, O Jerusalem, bearer of good news; lift *it* up, do not fear. Say to the cities of Judah, ‘Here is your God!’ ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, with His arm ruling for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him.” This was Isaiah’s gospel, his good news. God was coming personally to reign in a world of darkness and despair!

There are three things we see concerning this **“kingdom of God”** in Jesus’ proclamation. First, Jesus said, **“The time is fulfilled.”** In the Greek the word here translated **“time”** is *kairos*, not *kronos*, the word used for mere chronological time. It means “a favorable, opportune, or significant time” [Brooks, *NAC: Mark*, 47]. It refers to the time that God had appointed to fulfill His promises. The period of preparation, both in the prophets and in John the Baptist, was now complete. Jesus said that these prophecies of the past concerning the kingdom had now been fulfilled. But how?

Jesus continued, **“The kingdom of God is at hand.”** This is a reference to the present aspect of **“the kingdom of God”** and how it is that the time had been fulfilled. Jesus’ announcement was that the long anticipated kingdom was now in their midst. Remember, this rule of the kingdom was established wherever God was present. Jesus’ statement here was a reference to Himself. He Himself was the center and substance of the good news concerning the kingdom. The King had come to rule His kingdom. Jesus was now in their midst. Roger Ellsworth notes, “‘The kingdom of God is at hand’ reveals that the kingdom had, in the person of Jesus, come right into the midst of the lives of his hearers” [*The Guide*, 265]. This phrase then is a reference to God’s grace in entering into time and space in the person of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom, **“the kingdom of God.”** So it is here, at this time, that the mystery of the gospel begins to unfold. The stories that follow in Mark’s account serve to show both Jesus’ authority as King as well as to peel back, bit by bit, the veil of this mystery.

But this kingdom will not be fully manifested until the Lord’s return. There is a future aspect to this kingdom as well. This present, spiritual kingdom will be fully manifest when the Lord returns to this earth to establish His earthly kingdom. Then, His power and glory will be fully displayed. What did Jesus tell His disciples to pray in the Model Prayer? “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). This is when “the children of the kingdom,” who are at present allowed to exist side by side with “the children of the wicked one,” will be separated and judgment will be wrought. At the last supper Jesus said to His disciples, “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18). In both of these places Jesus indicates a future aspect of the kingdom. So we see this “already/not yet” aspect of the kingdom of God. Jesus remains the central figure in this future display as well. Cranfield noted that what the people of God now await “is not something more complete than Christ himself, but rather Christ manifest in glory” [*The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 66].

So we see the focus of Jesus' preaching was **"the kingdom of God,"** or His rule and authority as King over all people and all creation. Christ too must be the center of our preaching and ministry. We must "preach Christ and Him crucified," both His person and His work. Preaching that has any other focus is not gospel preaching. All of our proclamation must, as Spurgeon so eloquently put it, "make a beeline to the Cross." This is what it is to preach the kingdom of God.

3. It's plea (v. 15b) – "Repent and believe the gospel"

Gospel preaching does not simply relate the facts of the gospel and then leave it. As we see in the preaching of Christ, there is a plea, an urgent appeal to be extended. Jesus said, **"Repent and believe in the gospel."** The gospel of God in Christ Jesus demands a response for one to truly be saved from the wrath of God and become children of the kingdom. These make up two sides of the same coin we call conversion.

The first response to the gospel is to **"repent."** This repentance is the same repentance that John the Baptist proclaimed that we noted would have been a wake up call for these Jews. They too needed to repent. They were not safe in the kingdom simply by being heirs of Abraham. They were sinners who needed to repent of their sins. This is true of all of us because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; "there is none who do good, no not one." True repentance consists of recognizing one's sinfulness, how their sin separates them from a holy and just God, and turning from sin and renouncing sin. It is a true hate for sin.

But repentance is not enough. As a matter of fact, repentance is not real if one simply turns from sin but does not turn to someone else. That is the flip side of the coin in true conversion that Jesus proclaimed, that one must not only repent, but also **"believe in the gospel."** **"Believe"** means a continuing trust in the gospel. The word in the Greek is from *pistis*, which means "faith."

Faith involves three things, all which are needed in true saving faith. The first is knowledge about the gospel of Christ. It is an intellectual understanding of the truths of Scripture in general, and the truths of the gospel in particular. It is understanding that man is sinful and at enmity with God, separated from Him for all eternity in His wrath, needing to be reconciled to Him and this reconciliation is provided in the satisfactory, substitutionary, sacrificial work of Christ alone. It is an understanding that the gospel is the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

But knowledge of these truths is not enough. It must be accompanied by a deep conviction that these things are true. Saving faith includes a second thing, the mind's assent to the truth of the gospel. It is to agree that these truths correspond to one's spiritual needs.

But one cannot be saved by mere intellectual assent alone. The devil knows the gospel is true and he hates it. There is a third element to saving faith, and that is trust. It is an act of the will. It is to cast oneself upon Christ as the object of faith with complete confidence that He alone is the fit Redeemer. A simple way of illustrating this is that we might believe with every ounce of our being that a glass of water can quench our thirst, but mere intellectual assent to this truth will not help our thirst. We must drink it. The same is true of saving faith. We might have a deep intellectual understanding of the saving truths of the gospel. But until we receive Him and pledge our allegiance to Him, we remain in a state of wrath. Only Christ can appease the wrath of God, and it is by receiving Christ that one is truly saved.

"Jesus came... preaching." The purpose of His message was to glorify God and His gospel. The focus of His message was the kingdom of God, which is the rule and reign of God in Christ, who is the kingdom of God. His plea, repent and believe in the gospel. Jesus entire

ministry on this earth was wrapped up in proclaiming this message. His miracles pointed to it. His parables pointed to it. His life, death, burial and resurrection affirmed it. That is our message today.

II. Faithful Followers (1:16-20)

Jesus ministry did not begin in a vacuum. The gospel He proclaimed was meant for all men of all ages. Knowing that His time on this earth was short, Jesus sought men that He might pour His life into, both in Word and in deed. **“As He was going along by the sea of Galilee”** Jesus had a divine encounter with four men, two sets of brothers. We will look at the lives of these men in more detail in chapter 3. Mark’s emphasis here is on Jesus’ call and their response.

1. Jesus’ call

Though Jesus comes among these men on two separate occasions, the call is the same, **“Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (v. 17)**. There are a few things we notice concerning this call.

First, this was not the men’s first encounter with Jesus. In John 1:35-42 we learn that these men had already submitted to the baptism of John and become his disciples. Upon hearing John’s proclamation, “Behold the Lamb of God,” (v. 36) they followed Jesus. It is clear then from John’s account that these men, Simon, Andrew, James, and John had already trusted Jesus as Messiah and followed Him savingly. Mark does not share this detail but focuses here on their call to service.

Second, Jesus initiated the call. Just as it is in salvation, so it is with service. We do not seek God; God seeks us. Jesus came looking for them; they were not looking for Jesus. And He issues the call, **“Follow Me.”** Here Jesus demonstrates His authority. This command would have demonstrated immense arrogance and pride if He were not the King of the kingdom. This was not a call to follow Him on a temporary basis. It was a call of continual following, of forsaking all and serving Him.

Third, Jesus called a group of fishermen. They were busy with their vocations when Jesus comes upon them, Simon and Andrew in the boat (v. 16) and James and John mending their nets (v. 19). Fishermen were common men, often unschooled or uneducated. This certainly does not mean that they were ignorant, but they would be teachable. So Jesus chooses a humble, uneducated group of men as the foundation to carry on His ministry. We have the rest of the New Testament to show how significant their call to discipleship was.

Fourth, we see the promise attached if they were to obey. **“Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”** While there certainly is an evangelistic thrust to the promise, the magnitude of this promise to *these* men is often missed. This is much more than simply a play on words, Jesus turning **“fishermen”** into **“fishers of men.”** It was a call that would be very demanding. As Sinclair Ferguson notes,

These men were called to be ‘fishers of men.’ When the picture of ‘fishing’ is used to describe the activity of God in the Old Testament, it always has an ominous ring to it. God’s ‘fishing’ takes place in the context of judgment (for example, Jeremiah 16:16-18). Jesus did not hide that fact from his new disciples. Their mission was to rescue men from the judgment of God. [*Let’s Study Mark*, 12].

In this we see the demands of the call upon these men. Following Christ does not guaranty one that it will always be easy or comfortable. These men would not be very popular as time went

on. They faced turmoil and persecution for being disciples of Christ. Jesus was faithful to His promise. He did make them **“fishers of men”** in a way far beyond what they could have imagined.

2. Their response

All of these men, sensing the urgency in Jesus’ command, **“immediately”** followed Him (vv. 18, 20). There was no hesitation on their part. Their response was instant and complete. Instant is emphasized by Mark’s favorite word **“immediately.”** But notice the complete surrender to Jesus’ call.

We are told that Simon and Andrew **“left their nets and followed Him.”** Leaving their nets was a definite act that terminated their business. They abandoned their livelihoods, their vocation, to follow Jesus. This was not a rash response but a devoted response. For them, the cost of disobedience was much greater than the cost of obedience. They immediately follow Jesus with the utmost confidence that He would provide for them. They left their nets – and they never returned.

While the same is said of James and John, we notice something further in their response to Jesus’ call. **“They left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away and followed Him” (v. 20).** These men left their family behind. Mark is careful to tell us that they left their father **“with the hired servants.”** They did not put their father’s business in jeopardy by immediately following Jesus. There were others to do their work. So James and John left their family to follow Jesus.

These men demonstrated that being a disciple of Christ, which literally means “follower of Christ,” involves a radical commitment to Him. That is no less true for those today who are His disciples. He might not call us away from our jobs or our families, but would you follow Him unreservedly if He did? While our call is not with the import of these men, Jesus nonetheless calls His children to follow Him wherever He leads them into service. And His promise is the same as it was with these men, **“I will make you fishers of men.”** There must be urgency in our message. The lost await the judgment of God. As we follow Him, our plea remains His plea, **“Repent and believe in the gospel.”**

Conclusion

1. Have you heeded Christ’s message this morning? Have you repented of your sins? Have you made a conscious turning from your sins? Some have nothing but a deep sorrow or and overwhelming sense of guilt for sin. While godly sorrow and guilt is part of true repentance, it is not full repentance. True repentance loathes sin and is determined, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, to put it away. It is a total abandonment of any effort to rule our own lives and establish our own kingdom. This is involved both in saving repentance and sanctifying repentance.

But repentance in and of itself is not enough. Repentance alone gains us nothing. The message of the gospel is, **“Repent and believe in the gospel.”** You must do more than turn from sin. You must turn to the Christ that is the heart of the gospel. As we have seen, saving faith is more than just knowledge about Christ. It is even more than assenting to these truths. It is confidently transferring all reliance for forgiveness for sins, righteousness and cleansing away from your own devices to the finished work of Christ. It is joyfully receiving Christ’s meritorious work on your behalf for salvation.

Have you truly repented and believed this morning?

2. If you have trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior today, then how are you following Him? We must be continually examining ourselves to make sure that we are serving Christ outside of our comfort zones, both in our conduct (in our actions) as well as in our confession (with our words.) Jesus' calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John represent two areas of our lives that can subtly become hindrances to our following Him. Our jobs and our families can become unconscious excuses for neglecting our ministry in the gospel. If I were to ask you this morning what consumes the better part of your life, most of you would answer things related to vocation and family. We get up, we go to work or school, we come home, and then it is off to some family event, whether it be something at school, athletics, or shopping for the family. We come home, we spend a few moments together with the family, then it is off to bed. The next day brings the same set of responsibilities. I think this would describe most of our lives. And nothing in this is wrong in and of itself. We have biblical responsibilities in our jobs and with our families. However, there must be a balance. Often, in this rat race, we neglect our responsibility to take the gospel to a lost and dying world. We become complacent in speaking to and living for the sick. Even if we manage to slip in our daily quiet time, which is also a spiritual responsibility, we can still neglect to carry the good news to those who are living in bad news. This is why Jesus said, "Deny yourselves (are you faithfully serving *Him* and not *self*?), take up your cross (an emblem of suffering, shame, and yes, discomfort), and follow me." But that is not the last word in Jesus' command, is it? He adds, "Daily." Why do you think He added that little caveat? Because He knew the daily demands of life could become hindrances and unconscious excuses to become complacent.

So how are you following Him? Are you doing so joyfully, faithfully, and selflessly? If your life is defined by comfort, then perhaps you need to do a spiritual appraisal. However, is our perceived inconveniences usually provide an opportunity to follow Him more faithfully.