

Time to Reflect

- What are some of the barriers that hinder people from embracing the good news of God?
- Are there specific ways in which we could serve God faithfully and with total obedience?

Last week we focused on the opening verses of Mark's gospel. We reflected on what we referred to as a time of preparation: for Jesus, for the people who were listening to the preaching of John the Baptist and would soon experience the ministry of Jesus, and for us as we commenced our journey through Mark's gospel. This week our attention is drawn to the beginning of the mission and ministry of Jesus. We will encounter miracles, teaching and the call of the first disciples.

"Glancing through the rest of Mark 1, we discover Jesus came as the Master to call His disciples by the shore, as the Holy One to cast out demons from an unclean man in the synagogue, as the Healer who touched multitudes in Peter's home making them whole, as the Intercessor who spent time on the mountain alone with God in spite of His busy ministry, as the sympathising Saviour preaching throughout Galilee and the Friend of all friends who touched and cleansed the despairing man who had been afflicted with leprosy."

(Victor Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant in Mark's Gospel*, p29)

Specifics

- The scene is set very quickly in this week's passage. John the Baptist was arrested and his short but effective ministry was ended. Yet this event brought with it the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. Mark simply records "After John was in prison, Jesus went into Galilee..." (v14).
- After a brief introduction, Mark's gospel springs into action. Our attention is immediately drawn to the preaching of Jesus and how he sought to proclaim "...the good news of God" (v14).
- William Barclay reflects on the content of this good news as it is defined in the New Testament. It is the good news of truth (Galatians 2:5), hope (Colossians 1:23), peace (Ephesians 6:15), God's promise (Ephesians 3:6), immortality (2 Timothy 1:10), and salvation (Ephesians 1:13)¹.
- As Jesus declared the good news that the Kingdom of God had come, he offered two clear challenges to his listeners – repent and believe.
- To repent means to turn away from sin and reorientate ourselves towards God. It necessitates a change of thinking, behaviour and attitudes, not merely the offering of words.
- To really believe "...simply means to take Jesus at his word, to believe that God is the kind of God that Jesus has told us about, to believe that God so loves the world that he will make any sacrifice to bring us back to himself, to believe that what sounds too good to be true is really true."²
- This is a life-changing message and it demands response. We are offered a model response in (v16-20).

¹ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1975), pp24-26.

² Ibid, p26.

- In looking at the call of the first disciples it is interesting to note that John 1:35-42 highlights that these four fishermen had been disciples of John the Baptist. Note the call of Jesus to “Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people” (v17).
- This call was issued to an unlikely group of people who had been engaged in their daily work. They hadn’t trained under the best scholars of their age nor were they from the high levels of society. They were ordinary fishermen and they were called by Jesus to take a step of faith and follow Him.
- This is a timely reminder that God still calls ordinary people and He equips them to do an extraordinary job. God calls us, leads us and transforms us into the people that He longs for us to be.
- When we think about the lives of Peter and John, we get good examples of this. Victor Maxwell writes, “Jesus Christ transformed the fickle life and will of Peter to make him a mighty fisher of men. He transformed the life of John, a ‘son of thunder,’ and made him the apostle of love. Think not of how weak you are. Trust in what God can make you to be.”³
- Note that the call of Jesus had only one condition – “...follow me...” (v17). This short statement is, however, profoundly important. It requires us to forsake our own will, it demands that we put Jesus first in all things and then we commit ourselves to following Him entirely and without condition.
- Note, also, that this is a call to action. Jesus said “...I will send you out to fish for people” (v17). This is mission on the frontline, the great work of seeking to win souls for Christ.
- All four fishermen heard the call of Jesus and they responded immediately. (v18) uses the phrase “At once...” and (v20) says “Without delay...” Here we see obedience which was immediate and complete.
- Ralph Earle accurately observes, “We cannot follow Jesus until we are willing to forsake our own plans and wishes.”⁴
- Our passage now takes us to Capernaum, a commercial city on the main road of travel between Egypt and Damascus. Here we encounter the first miracle of Jesus, as recorded in Mark’s gospel. In driving out the impure spirit, Jesus demonstrated His authority. Note how the impure spirit recognised and acknowledged the authority of Jesus (v24).
- Jesus also spoke with authority in Capernaum (v22). Imagine being in Capernaum that Sabbath when Jesus began to teach. We are told that the people were amazed (v22, v27). Little wonder that news about Jesus spread throughout the whole region (v28).
- Victor Maxwell offers an important insight into Capernaum and the ministry of Jesus as he calls our attention to Matthew 11:23. He writes, “Casting out the demons was the first of five great miracles Jesus did in Capernaum. Special condemnation was reserved for that town because they refused to believe in spite of the miracles done there.”⁵
- This is a challenge for all of us to journey beyond hearing and seeing to respond to Jesus with sincere faith and total belief.
- Our passage concludes by calling our attention to a second miracles of Jesus (the healing of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law) and the subsequent healing of other people. Once more these are demonstrations of the authority and power of Jesus.
- There are two magnificent and revelatory phrases recorded in these final verses. “...people brought...Jesus healed...” (v32-34). Here we see the compassion of Jesus and the authority of Jesus.
- There are no exact numbers given because numbers don’t matter. What matters is that lives were changed and Jesus is still busy transforming lives today.

³ Victor Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant in Mark’s Gospel* (Belfast: Ambassador Productions, 1996), p29.

⁴ Ralph Earle, *Mark: The Gospel Of Action* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p18.

⁵ Maxwell, *The Authentic Servant in Mark’s Gospel*, p31.