

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Mark 1:14-20

Verses 14,15

After John was taken into custody, Jesus entered into Galilee. He preached the gospel of God saying, "The time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God has drawn near. Repent and believe in the good news."

While we think of the baptism of Jesus as the beginning of his ministry, which is correct, nevertheless, after this occurred he was tempted in the wilderness and spent time there alone. Nothing is heard of Jesus until **John was arrested**. That event was a trigger for starting his ministry of preaching. Jesus did not attempt to cut across his relative's work but in humility waited for his Father to give him the signal. With John taken into custody, a new voice was heard in Israel, first of all **in Galilee**, his home region.

This is a summary of what Jesus was saying in his preaching ministry. First, we note that he preached. The word of God came before the action of God. A new message required to be **preached**. It was called **the gospel of God**. Mark opens his gospel with this very word: The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ (1). This term came to be given to the writings of the four evangelists, which is what **gospel** actually means, literally **evangel** εὐαγγέλιον. It is a document that provides the content for evangelism. In this verse, it is the content of Jesus' preaching that can be placed under the title gospel, or good news (8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:9; 16:15).

As we can see from these supporting verses, the gospel is preached. It is a revelation of God and yet much more, for it is his amnesty, his offer of peace and redemption to people under judgement and immanent destruction in hell. Hence it is God's initiative to save his people through Jesus Christ. As God's work it is called **the gospel of God**.

Some of the very words of Jesus' preaching are given here: **The time has been fulfilled**. **Time**, here, is not chronos, the mere passage of time but spiritual time mingled with physical time, which is called καιρός. It is pregnant time, time filled with the purposes of God. In Christ, **the kingdom of God has drawn near**. Jesus is more than associated with the kingdom; he is the king coming to establish God's reign over the earth, a reign that begins with good news and the call to repentance. It **is near** because Jesus is near. A rule over peoples' lives in secular terms was not what Christ came to achieve. The call to repent is a call to receive the kingdom and possess it as owners. It is granted every believer (Dan 7:20; 1Cor 3:21,22).

To believe in the gospel or good news, **repentance** is required. However, repentance is not our work nor a pre-condition people are required to meet. Certainly, it can be seen as a human action, like grief (1Thess 4:13). However, Christ means both a judgement and a promise received by faith so that repentance becomes the path to salvation (2Cor 7:10). It is a call **to believe**. One rejects the old way of life, displeasing and sinful before God and receives the gift of salvation and a new set of behaviours to follow. Repentance is rejecting what has been striven for in an earthly kingdom to receive by faith what God gives through Christ, namely, free entry into his kingdom and a complete change of life.

Verses 16-20

While travelling along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, Simon's brother, casting [their nets] in the Sea, for they were fishermen. He said to them, "Follow me and I shall make you fishers of people." Immediately, having left their nets, they followed him. Going on a little, he saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother. They were in their boat mending the nets. Straight away, he called out to them and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and they went after him.

Interestingly, the less important of the disciples are mentioned as the first to be called in each couple, that is, Andrew and James. It could be that they were the older of each pair. No rationale is provided for calling these men. Luke's gospel mentions that the four were partners in a fishing business (Lk 5:7). It is not necessary to consider them uneducated or poor day labourers but rather as small business owners, for Zebedee had **hired servants** μισθωτων. In Luke's gospel, the miracle of nets full of fish when cast on the other side of the boat precedes the invitation to follow. Clearly, Jesus' teaching, his authoritative acts of forgiveness, his compassion and miracles, went before what appears to be a sudden following of Jesus.

Jesus interrupted their fishing activities. To the first pair, Andrew and Peter, he called them to **follow** but promised that they would have a leadership role in bringing others into the kingdom. Jesus replaced the old occupation with a new: **fishers of people**. A rabbi taught students who would be with him for a year or two. Often, young men left their careers to spend time learning Torah, hence the comment about being educated. However, Jesus acts differently to a traditional rabbi. First **he called** the students and chose them (Jn15:16). Normally, students selected the Rabbi. This indicates Christ's lordship for he is not merely a teacher but the Saviour who offers entry into the kingdom and is also the king, who has sovereign reign over their lives. Secondly, they were not merely studying but learning to fill a role, to fish for people. They were going to do work similar to Christ himself and Christ would be responsible for this training. Jesus was offering a great privilege to them. We might also add, that Rabbis traditionally attracted the elite scholars in addition to others, whereas, Jesus focused on a range of people, many of whom were either uneducated (Acts 4:13), or were compromised by working for the Romans, e.g. as tax collectors, or were zealots and capable of assassination and terrorism.

This would explain the sudden and from our point of view, impulsive action to leave everything behind for they were receiving a gift from the Lord Jesus as well as a role in his kingdom, even a prestigious role.

Fishers of people. Jesus told a parable about a net being spread over all kinds of fish, the good and bad were later sorted by the fishermen (Matt 13:47f). Christ's desire is to capture people for the kingdom, to save them and bring them into a living communion with him. The gospel is like fishing, it is offered to all, some respond, some do not, some come to Christ but are not sincere or committed, and others hear the good news and they become his disciples, changing and becoming like Christ. **Follow me** is much stronger than we often think, literally it is: **follow behind me** δευτε οπισω μου. This means to make the life of the Lord your entire existence; where he sleeps, you sleep, what he says, you say, his attitude are your attitudes, his work your work.

Andrew and Peter **left their nets** and James and John **left their father Zebedee** (Matt 4:21). Zebedee was part of the business and may have started it, so the four in the business were actually five. But Mark adds a detail often overlooked: there were **hired servants** as well, as mentioned above. Clearly, the business was a reasonably large enterprise and the four principle partners were leaving a significant business. Unless, Zebedee was too old and helped with lighter tasks in his old age. Jesus did not call him as a worker in the kingdom doing what Christ had been sent to do. Not everyone has to work for the church but never-the-less, have a vocation from the Spirit.

The reader will sense a greater meaning here too, in this act of **leaving** αφέντες, which is mentioned once for each pair of men. The gospel grants a complete reconciliation with God and experience of his love and grace. But it also calls for a commitment of one's whole life. Career and family come second to Jesus Christ.