

Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of Mark

Session Four – Mark 1:14-45

Mark 1:14-15 - After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Jesus and the Baptist

Mark leaves the details of what happened to John the Baptist to Chapter 6. For now, he wants to focus exclusively on Jesus and the beginning of his ministry, which is in some ways a continuation of that of John the Baptist, but is in other ways new.

Notice that Jesus “went into Galilee.” He had been absent for some time. The Gospel of John tells us Jesus was down in the area of John’s River Jordan baptismal site, continuing John’s ministry there, while John had moved on to Samaria; then John goes into Galilee, and Jesus follows in John’s path to Samaria. Now with John imprisoned, Jesus moves his own ministry into Galilee, where it would largely remain.

John 3:22-24 - After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptized. Now John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim (in Samaria), because there was plenty of water, and people were coming and being baptized. (This was before John was put in prison.)

Jesus’ message

Jesus returns from his time of solitude and testing in the desert and announces the good news of God. John was described as simply “preaching” (1:7), but Jesus is said to “proclaim the good news of God.” A proclamation announces something which has arrived, not something yet to come. Jesus is the Good News in the flesh! And it isn’t just any Good News, it is the Good News of God

The coming of the Kingdom

The coming of the kingdom of God is central theme in the Gospel. Mark mentions it over a dozen times, in the sermon and sayings and parables of Jesus. The big change is, that Jesus says it “has come near.” The word that used is in the perfect tense; it is something which is presently a reality. And so many translations use, “is at hand,” which is to say, ready to reach out and grasp.

Like an apple

I could tell you that I’ll bring you an apple. You would assume, correctly, that it isn’t here yet. Your apple is coming. But if I tell you “your apple is come,” (which is the perfect tense), you

could reach out your hand and say, “I’ll take it!” When Jesus proclaims the coming of the Kingdom, he invites you to reach out and take it.

The Time has Come

The future promised by God is no longer a flickering hope light years away; it has become available in the present. This is now the world view which the People of God are to embody. When we pray, “Thy Kingdom come,” we are praying that it comes in its final completeness for all people. But as Christians, we are already living it!

Imagine you’re a Roman...

The Roman Empire gave a fair degree of autonomy to regions under their control, as long as everyone paid their taxes, and recognised Rome as the ruling authority. However, rebellion in any form was quickly and brutally squashed. To announce a rival kingdom, and a rival King, was deeply dangerous!

“Repent”

In the Old Testament, the word used was “shuwb” which means, to “turn back,” or to “turn away” - to change direction. It’s a word still used today.

Ezekiel 18:30-32 - “Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Repent and live!”

Metanoia

The New Testament word for “repent” is “metanoia,” which is two words stuck together; “Meta,” which means “change” or “transform” (we use “meta” in the word “metamorphosis,” or “to change shape).” The second part of the word, “Noia,” means “mind, self or inner self.” To “repent” in the New Testament means to effect change in our very inner selves.

Believe! And live as though you do!

Repentance is the first step; to “believe in the Good News” is the continuation of the process. “Believe” is more than intellectual assent; it is a view of reality that impacts the way in which we live our lives.

Mark 1:16-45

Jesus has proclaimed that the time is now; the kingdom has come; we are called to live in this new reality. In this section, there are five scenes which show this coming to pass.

- 1) The calling of the disciples;
- 2) teaching with authority – even over demons;
- 3) healing the sick;
- 4) spreading the news;
- 5) attracting the multitudes

Mark 1:16-20 - As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said,

“and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Gathering His Gang

Jesus abruptly appears by the Sea of Galilee and without warning calls unsuspecting fishermen to be disciples. Jesus is not going to be a lone prophet wandering in the desert but a leader, whose task as Messiah is to create a community of followers. The immediate commitment of the fishermen in a miracle in itself!

No Class Distinction

Since Peter and Andrew cast nets from the shoreline, they are possibly too poor to own a boat while the Zebedees are more upscale, with a boat that can take them anywhere on the lake and hired hands to help with the labour. Even though they are all fishermen, there is a variety of social scale within the class.

Metanoia!

Whatever their circumstances, these men show their repentance, their desire “to turn,” by dropping everything to heed Jesus’ call. Their repentance is more than just a matter of an internal transformation; they turn into something that they are not now, from fishermen to fishers of men. How is our repentance demonstrated?

The Miracles in Mark

Frederick Buechner describes Mark as showing Jesus “scattering miracles like rice at a wedding.” Mark emphasizes the power of Jesus’ teaching, not its content. Jesus rarely gives lengthy sermons or speeches in Mark’s but instead offers short, impactful statements and dramatic action. A Messiah with authority, and a Gospel for people in a hurry.

Mark 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Capernaum

Located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum was a community of between 2000-5000 people. It was an important fishing centre, exporting throughout Israel, and through a processing facility in Magdala, throughout the empire. It was also on the border between the tetrarchies of Herod and his brother Philip, and so was a tax collection hub.

The Synagogue

Visitors today can see an impressive limestone synagogue, but this was not constructed until the mid-300s. It stands on the foundation of the synagogue present in Jesus' day.

Jesus was invited to teach on the Sabbath, perhaps on the basis of his relationship with John the Baptist.

The Unclean Spirit

The arrival of Jesus is like a rock thrown at a hornet's nest, resulting in a panicked reaction of unclean spirits. They know who Jesus is, even though the crowd does not. But Jesus commands the spirit to be silent; there's some publicity you don't want, when you consider the source!

The Authority over Evil

The New Testament tells us of Jewish exorcists operating in these days. However, their extensive rituals and uncertain results are quite different than Jesus simply commanding the evil spirit to come out. The reaction of the crowd to this is the same as their reaction to his teaching (which Mark, frustratingly, does not detail) – it is a sign of his authority.

Mark 1:29-34

As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

The House of Peter and Andrew

Located quite near the synagogue is a structure, the foundations of which, excavated in the 1960s, have been identified as the House of Peter. A large octagonal church (the shape indicates a church built to mark a specific location or event) built in the fifth century contain the remains of a much earlier church underneath, built around what was originally a private house.

The walls of this room had been plastered, and visitors had scratched prayers mentioning the name of Jesus on the plaster. The name of Peter is also mentioned in the inscriptions. In the fourth century AD this 'house church' was enlarged and enclosed within the walls of its own compound, separating it from the rest of the town.

It is interesting that this church was quite large and well-visited in the mid 300s, the same time as the new enlarged synagogue was constructed, almost right across the street. It is a sign of religious tolerance in Capernaum, and of good relations between Christians and Jews.

Peter's Mother-in-Law

Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law from a fever, which was considered a particularly difficult thing to do in ancient days, and a true sign of a healing from heaven. Peter's mother-in-law proves that she has fully recovered by waiting on them (lit., "she was serving them"), a sign of her physical wholeness and her spiritual responsiveness to Jesus.

Healed for Service

Such menial service does not suggest her insignificance; on the contrary, the angels offered Jesus the same service in the desert. Serving is also a characteristic of discipleship. Jesus' female followers seem to grasp the need to give themselves in service to others more quickly than the male followers. This miracle reveals that God heals so that one may better serve.

Mark 1:35-39

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

The Whole Town

Between the synagogue event and the healing of Peter's mother, Jesus is now a local celebrity, and Peter's house is crowded with those seeking healing. We'll see just how crowded in Chapter 2! The pressure is such that before dawn, Jesus has to sneak out and find a solitary place to pray

"Everyone is looking for you!"

Jesus isn't permitted much rest. When the disciples find him, he tells them it is time to spread the news beyond Capernaum – to all the synagogues in Galilee. Jesus points out that, "Preaching is why I have come." The miracles are drawing crowds, but the message is the point. His quickly growing fame is making preaching difficult!

Mark 1:40-45

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed.

Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.

What’s the Diff?

Mark 1:41 – some texts have a Greek word meaning “indignant,” most have “filled with compassion.” Since “indignant” or “angry” is unusual or surprising, many scholars think this is the original word, which was softened by later scribes to “moved with pity” or compassion.

Ancient Manuscripts

We don’t have an “original copy” of the Gospel of Mark. What we have are copies of copies of the original, found in many ancient manuscripts. The New Testament we have is a collection of all the best of these manuscripts. But within them, there are differences, mostly minor – “ifs, ands, buts.” Occasionally, there are larger differences, as in this verse. Big differences are noted in footnotes in most Bibles.

Why did the NIV change it?

The most recent version of the NIV has “indignant,” while the 1978 version has “Filled with compassion. Perhaps because in verse 43, we read, “Jesus sent him away at once with a stern (or strong) warning” – a choice of language more reflecting of indignation than compassion. But what made Jesus indignant or angry in the first place?

Causes of Jesus’ anger

- 1) Jesus was angry at the brokenness of the world. In the same way we are angry at cancer or covid, Jesus expressed anger at the effects of this debilitating disease
- 2) Or, perhaps Jesus was angry that this man was trying to manipulate him – “You could heal me if you really wanted to. If you could be bothered. But maybe you really don’t care about people like me.” Jesus’ response? “I am willing!”
- 3) Jesus knew that if he healed this fellow, despite instructing him in strongest terms to be silent, he would spread the news and impair Jesus’ freedom of movement, as the last verse states: *“As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places.”*