



Mark 1 & 2 - January 2024

Introduction



Mark 1: 14-28 The Kingdom of God is Near

(sermons: Jan 14)

Mark 1: 14-15 Jesus Begins Preaching

- v.14 *after John was put in prison – John the Baptist was imprisoned by Herod Antipas (one of Herod the Great’s sons who ruled Galilee on behalf of the Romans) for publicly condemning his adultery with his half-brother Herod Philip’s wife). Mark describes John’s imprisonment and later murder in 6:17-29.*
- v.14 *Jesus went into Galilee – the most northerly area of Jewish settlement, around Lake Galilee, where there were also some Gentile (non-Jewish) villages.*
- v.14 *proclaiming the good news of God – ‘preaching the gospel of God’ (RSV). We need to think what Jesus’s message was at this time, at the beginning of his public ministry, long before any mention of his future death and resurrection. Verse 15 implies that we must look back to Old Testament prophecies about what would happen when God or his Son/Messiah/anointed-King comes to rule his world.*
- v.15 *the time has come – ‘the time is fulfilled’ (Tom Wright, nearer to the Greek), or ‘the time has been fulfilled’ (even nearer).*
- v.15 *the kingdom of God has come near – kingdom or ‘kingship’ of God: his rule in his world, in and through his rule in the hearts and lives of his followers. Many Jews in Jesus’ time hoped that the Old Testament prophecies of God’s coming rule would be fulfilled by a leader who would win independence from their Roman overlords and restore a national political kingdom like that of King David. As he went on, Jesus taught that God’s kingdom began in the hearts of those who accepted him, his teaching and his forgiveness; that his kingdom would spread gradually and peacefully and would involve his own suffering, death and resurrection; and his kingdom would only be fully established when he returned at the end of time to re-create a new heaven-and-earth. As well as teaching about God’s rule, Jesus demonstrated God’s rule in healing people and delivering them from evil powers.*
- v.15 *Repent and believe the good news – to repent is not just to feel sorry for where we have gone wrong but to change direction towards God and the way that he wants us to live; the good news is that forgiveness and a fresh start are possible, and that God is at work to change us and his world.*
1. What do you think was the message that Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of his public ministry? How might it have been what people were hoping for and how might it have been different? In what ways was it ‘good news’ then – and now?
 2. What do you think it means to ‘repent’? What do we turn away from? What do we turn towards? Try to give examples of the sort of changes God might want to see in people’s lives today. Why does Jesus call us to ‘repent’ as well as ‘believe’? Do we include both parts of his message today?

Mark 1: 16-20 Jesus Calls his first Disciples

- v.17 *Come, follow me – to be disciples (=learners), at first by being with Jesus, seeing what he did and hearing what he taught, then by copying his words and actions*
- v.17 *I will send you out to fish for people – to invite others to follow Jesus*
- v.20 *they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men – this was a family fishing business, not just ‘one man and his boat’.*

3. What did Jesus call Andrew & Simon, James & John to do? What would it have cost them to do so?
How, as fishermen, would they have understood being told to *fish for people*?
How did they respond?
4. How is Jesus's call to us today similar to, or different from, his call to the first disciples?
What in practice does it mean to 'follow' Jesus today? How does Jesus still 'call' people?

Mark 1: 21-28 Jesus Overcomes Evil

- v.21 *Capernaum – a town on the north side of Lake Galilee, where Simon (Peter) had his fishing business, in which he had been joined by his brother Andrew. It became Jesus' base for his ministry.*
- v.21 *Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach – on the Sabbath, a visiting teacher might be invited to speak, perhaps choosing which Scripture would be read and then explaining it.*
- v.22 *as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law – most rabbis would quote what previous respected rabbis had said; perhaps Jesus simply told people what the Scriptures meant and how they applied to their lives, rather than quoting other teachers' interpretations.*
- v.23 *a man... possessed by an impure spirit – although this spiritual condition is still recognized today, it seems to have been more common in Jesus' time; perhaps because people's problems were more readily attributed to demon-possession, or perhaps the presence of Jesus provoked spiritual opposition.*
- v.25 *'Be quiet!' – Jesus didn't welcome being acknowledged by evil spirits, even if they spoke the truth about him. The 'impure' spirit could recognize its opposite: 'the Holy One of God'. Jesus was more concerned about the spiritual health and deliverance of the man whose life was being damaged..*
5. How do we understand what was going on in this man's life and what Jesus did for him?
Do we need to make up our minds about these matters, or should we avoid getting involved in what we do not understand? How and when should we confront evil?
In the Lord's Prayer, we pray: *'Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.'* How does that help us?
 6. What might make us wonder whether there was some evil spiritual force at work in someone's life, beyond their physical or psychological symptoms?
What are the dangers of getting involved in this area without proper knowledge or support?
How can we pray in general for people's spiritual (as well as physical and mental) health and wholeness without claiming to know whether any evil spiritual forces may be involved?
(The Church of England recognizes the need for a ministry of deliverance, on some occasions, alongside medical and spiritual ministry. Each diocese has recognized advisers in this area, who always work in collaboration with other clergy. Ministers who feel that this ministry may be needed are encouraged to contact these recognized advisers, via the Diocesan Healing Adviser.)