

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

Mark 1:1-20 (Key Verse 1)

“The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God”

In our own country, we hear of moral depravity and random violence every day. It is easy to lose hope for the future. In response, some harden their hearts and become selfish to establish their own secure future. Others try to maintain their families like an oasis in the desert, yet remove themselves from social responsibility. While many hurting people cry for help, no one is really concerned about them. Many offer social criticism, but not many are ready to serve those in need. Many leaders speak well to obtain power, but when they should serve those in need, they shrink back because it requires sacrifice. We lie to one another in order to gain certain things, we place our hopes in our careers for a good life. All of these things reveal the fundamental sin problem of mankind. They reveal our enmity with God and the power of death that rules our lives. The Gospel of Mark begins with this word, “The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The Gospel is not a novel, or documentary. The contents are not about philosophy or ethics. The word ‘Gospel’ was originally used to announce the good news or a very important news, such as the inauguration of the Roman emperor or the birth of the crown prince. However, the Gospel in the bible declares the most amazing and important event in human history, the coming of Jesus Christ.

God had promised to send his son as the Messiah to save mankind from their sin-sickness and suffering. According to God’s promise, Jesus came to this world. He died on the cross to pay the price of our sins. Three days later, Jesus rose again, proving that he is the true Messiah and his death was the death to save mankind. Since then, mankind became free from the bondage of their sin and received salvation by believing in Jesus. From this time on, the way of light, life and salvation opened in human history, driving out death and judgement. The books which declare this heart moving event are called the Gospel. Mark hoped that mankind would accept this Gospel and receive salvation. By saying, “The beginning of the Gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” In today’s passage, Mark tells us about how the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God began. It also teaches us about what to do in order to have the Gospel in our hearts and lastly we learn how we too can be Jesus gospel workers.

Verses 1-13 tells us about the preparation of the Gospel. Let us all read verse 1, once more, “The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” In this book is presented to us, the beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It is presenting important news about Jesus the Messiah. However, though this may be the beginning of the good news about Jesus, it is not by accident, coincidence or surprise. Look at verse 2-3, “...as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way” 3“a voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’ ” it was already prophesied long before in the old testament, that Jesus will come. Isaiah the prophet was speaking about John the Baptist. And so we read in verse 4, that “And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” He was the messenger of God and a forerunner of Jesus Christ. And so the Gospel was prophesied by God and fulfilled by Jesus.

Then how did John the ‘baptist’ prepare for the Gospel of Jesus. Look at verse 4 again, John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. For the gospel to begin in our hearts, man should first receive forgiveness for their sins. In order to forgive forgiveness man should repent. In other words, the gospel will not work in the heart that does not take sin for granted. Who keep enjoying their sin. They must be angry with their sinfulness and earnestly desire to never commit sins again.

Then, what should be repent from? Do we have to repent that we studied little and slept much, do we have to repent that we drink alcohol too much? Do we have to repent that we stole someone thing? Or do we have to repent that we thought of dirty and evil things? Indeed we should repent from these things. However, we should understand that all these are fruits or just branches. There is a spiritual sin at the root of man’s evil thinking and behavior. The real rooted sin is our wrong mind-set and attitude towards God. Though our God is living, mankind lives as though he does not exist. There is no fear of the lord. We live as though we are master’s of our fate. We live according to the trends, pursuing money, physical pleasure or power. Because our God is living, there is a great and profound sovereignty in the providence of the lord. However, many people end up hating those richer themselves and ignoring those who are poor. These are all as a result of a deed seated rejection of God a form of hatred towards Him. As we reflect on our lives, our thinking and behavior, we should find out such sins and repent. Only then the Gospel can work in our hearts.

However it is not easy to repent. At first it is painful and shameful to do so. We are also afraid to repent and live a different life from the previous one. Moreover we are actually doubtful whether we could indeed live a new life through repentance. In fact, repentance is actually war against ourselves and that war is quiet painful and distressing to all of us. Those who teach the bible should also help their bible students repent for the Gospel to work in their hearts, and this is even more difficult. However, through the Gospel we should help our bible students see their sins, rebuke them so they may repent. When John was preaching a baptism of repentance, he swore severely at the Pharisees and Sadducees, "you brood of vipers!" (Luke 3:7) just like him, we might have to say difficult things towards our bible students. Then they might rebel and leave us rather than repent. They may get along with those who sympathize with them and complain. They may be agonizing, thinking, why should I repent day and night, never getting praised once? And when we see their agonies, our hearts become painful because we see them stressing. Helping others repent involves a spiritual war and the birth pain of colliding with them, fighting with them and bearing those sufferings. One shepheress told me the missionaries once told her that she was selfish. She says she took offence of that, no one had ever told her that, however over time she realized it was actually true. It was only then that she could begin to join the missionary and go on campus for sharing the gospel of Jesus with students.

Therefore, both repenting of my sins and helping others to repent is impossible by our own efforts. But look at verse 8, "I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Here the baptism of water is given as a sign to those who decide to repent of their sins as a sign. So that Christ can come to their hearts. Jesus comes upon us through the Holy Spirit. In other words, when we repent, God baptizes us with the Holy Spirit. The Holy spirit comes to those who repent and gives them assurance of salvation. Through the Holy Spirit we develop new desires to live for the glory of God. Indeed when we repent we feel reborn, enjoying inexplicable joy, deep sense of freedom and peace. Less burden on our shoulders to live for God. Therefore, John in preparing people for the Gospel, preached the baptism of repentance so that he could help people to receive the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit we get the assurance that our sins are forgiven and can live a new life.

Look at verse 5, "The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River." Here we realize something important. Outwardly, people may seem to hate repentance, however, they are actually eager to repent. After all man is a being created in the image of God. When we commit sin, our souls are frustrated and our conscience is troubled. Though indeed some people have come to a point where they don't feel at all because their soul is sick and conscience paralysed. But when those people were helped by John the baptist, they could accept their true self and repent.

How could John the baptist have such power to influence? Verse 6 tells us that, John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He lived a poor but honest life. Nobody trusts a message of a person living in luxury. John was a man of spirit who lived a temperate life in solitude in the desert. He lived continuously talking to the Lord. A man of character with spiritual power. It is my prayer that we may grow to be the Lord's servants with spiritual power like John the baptist so that we too may build up the work of repentance in this generation.

For repentance an honest environment is also important. In a place where there are lies, boasting and evil men who enjoy popularity and profit. The work of repentance can never occur. Repentance can only occur in an environment filled with love, where anybody can be accepted and forgiven, if only they repent. It is my prayer that our ministry may be full of faithfulness and love which only possible if we but live by faith in God. May we repent and receive the freedom and life of the Gospel.

Verses 9-15 tells us now look at how the gospel began, while John was busy preaching the baptism of repentance, preparing people for the way. Jesus Christ came and began his gospel work. How did Jesus begin his gospel work? **First, the baptism of Jesus (9-11).** Look at verse 9, "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." Baptism is a ceremony demonstrating one's repentance. Now, because Jesus had no sin as the Son of God, he neither had to repent nor be baptised. So, why was Jesus baptised? By being baptised Jesus was identifying with sinners. He ultimately died as a result of punishment of judgement that human beings deserve for their sins. God allowed Jesus to take up people's judgement and punishment for sin upon himself bearing it on our behalf.

Baptism was also an inauguration ceremony for Jesus, as our Messiah. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, the people saw heaven open and the spirit descending like a dove. Verse 11 says, "11And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." God showed his approval of Jesus as the Messiah, God was well pleased with Jesus

as the saviour of the world over sin. God himself declared that Jesus is the Son of God. Apostle Peter once said, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)"

Second, the gospel began with Jesus' testing in the wilderness (12-13). Right after Jesus' inauguration, he did not attend a big celebration party. Rather, the Spirit sent him at once out into the wilderness, where he spent forty days being tempted by Satan (12-13a). It was God's will for the Messiah to confront the real enemy, Satan, immediately. The Spirit sent Jesus into the real battlefield instead of an ivory palace. It was because the Messiah as the second Adam, the representative of mankind, had to overcome Satan's temptation. Where the first Adam had failed, Jesus won the victory that liberates mankind from the power of Satan.

In the movie "Rocky", as the movie opens, the camera is focused on a painting of Jesus, the Messiah. Then the camera pans to the figure of an ordinary club fighter, Rocky Balboa, fighting in the ring. The writer and actor, Sylvester Stallone said that this was intentional. He wanted Rocky to symbolize the Messiah, who fights against evil in the world as a champion of the weak. Though Stallone fell into temptation in the midst of his success, he now professes faith in Jesus as Messiah. To be sure, gospel ministry is a very real battle against Satan. The hard realities of spiritual warfare should not surprise us. Jesus prayed for his disciples: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one...As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (Jn 17:15,18). Sometimes, we feel that we are surrounded by "wild animals." But Jesus has gone ahead of us and won the victory. He helps us to fight against Satan by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we depend on Jesus we can also experience victory.

Third, the gospel began with Jesus' proclamation (14-15). Preparation was now complete and it was time to start gospel ministry. At that time, John was put in prison because he rebuked Herod for his sin of adultery. John was a national hero, and the conscience of the nation. Herod's action must have sparked outrage and public demonstrations. Did Jesus go to Herod's palace and bargain for John's release? Did Jesus organize a resistance movement to establish a new government? No. Jesus withdrew into Galilee and began to proclaim the good news of God. Jesus knew who the real enemy was and fought a spiritual battle, not a political or military battle. Jesus challenged his times by proclaiming the gospel, for the gospel is the power of God for salvation that solves the real problem in the world.

What was Jesus' first message? Let's read verse 15. **"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"** What does "The time has come" mean? Since Adam's fall, God had prepared for a long time to send the Messiah to save people. At last, God's set time had fully come (Gal 4:4). Jesus' coming into the world was the beginning of a new era, dividing history into two parts: B.C. and A.D. Jesus proclaimed, "The kingdom of God has come near." The kingdom of God is not a geographical location. It refers to the invisible reign of God through Messiah Jesus. Whoever accepts Jesus as the Messiah, the King, can have the kingdom of God in their hearts. Now, anyone who receives Jesus as Messiah has salvation and can begin a new personal history. If God rules our hearts, then the kingdom of God is in our hearts. When the kingdom of God comes into our hearts, then we can have true salvation, life, love and enough power to challenge even the most difficult things. Mankind has many problems. But the main cause of all problems is that they are not ruled by God. When God is not ruling our heart, we are ruled by sins such as lust, boasting, hatred and lies. Jesus has come to save us from being ruled by sin and Satan, granting us the kingdom of God in our hearts. Jesus said "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" Repentance and faith are the most important words in the bible. Repenting of our sins and believing in Jesus is the only way for man to be saved. It is my hope that we may repent and believe the gospel so that God may rule us and his kingdom may come into our hearts. May the kingdom of God spread to our family, campus, workplaces and to the whole world through each one of us, Amen!

We should also take note that the Gospel began in the desert. John the Baptist preached the baptism of repentance in order to prepare for the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus was baptised in the desert and also overcame Satan's temptation in the desert. Thus, Jesus began his Gospel work in the desert. Same time things became desolate like the desert as John was placed in prison. Religious leaders had fallen into hypocrisy and self-righteousness. Our time is also difficult time for the gospel work to be carried out. The church has become materialistic and relativistic. We are in times of spiritual wilderness, where it is hard to repent and difficult for the Gospel ministry to be carried out. On campus there is peer pressure to follow the trends otherwise you are labeled badly by other students. At our work places you are made to feel you are out-dated with life as though you are primitive because you believe in Jesus. However even in this barren spiritual environment of Jesus in the desert, the gospel had begun. It became fruitful and spread throughout the world. The gospel that saves mankind works in any time and

environment. When we look at the world we cannot see hope. But we are encouraged when we think about how the Gospel had begun first in the wilderness. May we repent so that the gospel may begin in our hearts and God's kingdom may be established in our hearts.

Now that the gospel has begun, what is next? Jesus calls ordinary people to be his gospel workers. Look at verse 16-17, "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. 17"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." Jesus further called James son of Zebedee and his brother John (18-20). Jesus did not mean that he would take them to a better fishing spot. He meant that they should follow and learn from him. Jesus wanted to make them his disciples, his gospel workers. Follow Me: With this invitation, Jesus shows what Christianity is all about: following Jesus. At its root, Christianity is not about theological systems, rules, or even helping people — it is about following Jesus. And they all at once left their nets and followed Jesus (18).

When Jesus called them to be fishers of men, He called them to do what He did. He was the greatest fisher of men ever. But He wanted others to do the work He did; first these four, then twelve, then hundreds, then thousands and thousands upon thousands through the centuries. Before Jesus called his disciples, they were just catching fish to eat and make a living. They lived to just eat and survive. Even animals do that. That is why many we may find ourselves asking ourselves? What am I living for? Is life worth living for? What is the meaning of my life? We can easily fall into despair be left wondering many hours, seeing everything as meaningless. Or the opposite happens we become motivated to live a materialistic life. However, because of the gospel about Jesus. Because of these wonderful news about Jesus. We can live purpose driven lives. Jesus said, come follow me and I will make you into fishers of men. It is Jesus who helps us out of meaninglessness and a senseless robotic following routine life into a meaningful life of mission. Simon only followed fish, and fish determined his state of living. When he caught many fish he was happy. When he did not he took it out on his wife. Fish made him smile or cry. Though he fished in the big sea of galilee, his life was small and meaningless. He did not find any hope or meaning in his life. However, when he followed Jesus and became a man of mission to help others and seek God's work first, Peter began to embrace and love people wholeheartedly. Jesus calling saves us from living an empty and meaningless lives. His calling is really a word of blessing that makes our lives great in God's eyes. I pray that we may respond immediately and not waste any precious time.

In conclusion, the Gospel about Jesus has already begun may we reveal to the world this Gospel by, firstly repenting and believing the gospel and secondly, by responding to Jesus call today, "come follow me.". For when we follow Jesus it is Jesus who gradually transforms us into His Gospel workers. And since we follow Jesus, Jesus promises to take care of us and will never forsake us. Since you have heard the Gospel, are you following Jesus or following fish? May God bless our ministry to raise up fishers of men. Amen!