

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

Mark 1:1-15

Key Verse: 1:1

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

In the world around us, bad things happen. Last week in Nigeria, Muslim extremists kidnapped hundreds of school girls and threatened to sell them into slavery. 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 extricate 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. Sadly, this is true even of parents with their children, and spiritual leaders. Still, there are some who really serve those in need with humility and sacrifice. This week Kevin Durant was chosen as MVP (Most Valuable Player) of the National Basketball Association. In his acceptance speech, he did not boast about himself. Rather, he thanked his coach and each of his teammates personally. Most of all, he thanked his mom, a single mother, who sacrificed everything to raise him and his brother. With many tears, he said, “Mom, you are the real MVP.” It was so heart-moving that millions of people are now talking about it. Those who serve others with humility and sacrifice make a real difference in the world. That is what Jesus really wants his people to learn. Let’s learn Jesus’ servanthship and shepherd’s heart as we study Mark’s gospel.

There are four gospels which describe Jesus’ life and ministry, each from a different perspective, and each begins differently. Mark’s gospel begins with a declaration of the good news about Jesus. Let’s read verse 1. **“The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God....”** These words declare the beginning of God’s salvation work. Just as Genesis 1:1 proclaims God the Creator and the era of creation, so Mark 1:1 proclaims Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, and the era of salvation. Since Jesus has come into the world, all the powers of darkness are defeated and are

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

disappearing, and the power of life has begun to work mightily. This is really good news. The phrase “good news” is repeated three times in this passage (1,14,15). It comes from the Greek word “εὐαγγέλιον” (yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on), which means “gospel.” There are many kinds of good news, but the gospel is unique. It is not just information, or a moral teaching, or a philosophy. It is the good news about Jesus who defeated the power of sin and death through his death and resurrection. This good news, the gospel, is not just for a few favored people. It is for all kinds of people of all nations. The gospel is much more than the biography of a great man; it is the story of the Messiah, God’s Anointed One, the Son of God. In verses 2-15 Mark tells us how the gospel began.

First, the gospel began with John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord (2-8). Verses 2-3 are prophesy about the forerunner of the Messiah. The words “...as it is written in Isaiah the prophet...,” tell us that the gospel did not appear abruptly. It fulfilled God’s promise in the Old Testament. The gospel is not a cleverly devised story made by man. God promised it through the prophets many centuries before. And finally, God fulfilled it. The gospel came from God who is almighty, eternal and unchanging. So the gospel is trustworthy. Civilizations come and go. The gospel remains (1 Pe 1:23).

As was prophesied, John the Baptist came and appeared in the wilderness (4a). His mission was to prepare the way for the Lord. How did he do this? He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (4b). Here, the word “repentance” comes from the Greek word “μετανοια” (met-an'-oy-ah), which means to change one’s mind. It means to turn from the world to God, from self to Christ. On his first missionary journey, Paul challenged the Galatians: “We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them.” One pastor compares the human heart to a factory that constantly produces idols. Among them are one’s self, pleasure, money, power, or some dazzling human being—a hero figure, and even children who can become idols to their parents. When idols rule our hearts we feel anxious, insecure and empty. They cannot give us any help in times of trouble. Yet our hearts are so easily drawn to them. The true meaning of repentance is to turn our hearts from these idols to God. When we hear the word “repentance” we may feel burdened. But actually it really refreshes our hearts. Peter said, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Ac 3:19). When we serve the true and living God, he gives us joy and peace and blesses us. Repentance is the way of blessing. John the Baptist did not try to soothe suffering people with kind words. Rather, he challenged them to turn their hearts to the living God. In this way he really loved their souls. Real love is to help people turn their hearts to God.

When John delivered the message of repentance, what happened? Did people feel burdened and run away from him? To our surprise, the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him (5a). They sincerely confessed their sins, and were baptized by John in the Jordan River (5b). It was a national spiritual awakening. Many people in our time are very burdened by their sins. If someone just tells them to repent, they may respond. Let’s share the message of repentance in love, like John the Baptist. Who knows? God may bring about a national revival in our time.

John the Baptist worked in the wilderness (4). People think that God’s work may be done in the most favorable situation. In the wilderness it is hard to do much. In the daytime it is very hot, and at night it is cold and there is no heating or air conditioning. There is no Internet connection, cell phone service, or computer terminal. There is no supermarket, or even a small convenience store. When I attended a conference in Sudan a few years ago, I could experience this kind of wilderness. In some respect, I felt stuck. But there, God’s grace overflowed, and continues to overflow today. God’s work does not depend on the situation. John did the work of God in the wilderness. It was possible when he was full of the Spirit and power of God, like Elijah (Lk 1:17). When we believe the power of the gospel, we can experience the work of God in any situation, even in the wilderness areas.

John’s message was very powerful—it shook the whole country. His message was closely associated with his lifestyle. Verse 6 says, **“John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.”** It seems that John had only one garment which he wore day and night. His diet is not appealing, but it was nutritious. He lived a pure and simple life. We are living in a land flowing with milk and honey. It is easy to become self-indulgent. But this causes us to lose our spirit and become useless. This was the problem of religious leaders in John’s time (Lk 20:46-47). When we live a pure and simple life we can experience the

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Let's live a pure and simple life, full of the Holy Spirit.

The real secret of John's success can be found in the contents of his message. It was Christ-centered. When John became popular, people were wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah (Lk 3:15). As the spotlight of human recognition shines on someone, he can stumble in vanity, talking all about himself and very little about Jesus. Yet John held on to God's calling as the forerunner of the Messiah. He remembered his own limitations, and that he was just a servant. Most of all, he realized who Jesus was: God himself, who is alone worthy to receive honor and glory from all human beings. John faithfully delivered this message: "After me comes one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (7-8). John urged people to go to Jesus, whose ministry was far greater than his. Jesus alone can solve a person's life problem. It is because Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes people from the inside out and brings the kingdom of God in our hearts. Knowing this, John humbled himself and pointed people to Jesus, so that they might come to him. In this way he prepared the way for the Lord.

Second, the gospel began with Jesus' baptism (9-11). As John was preaching the baptism of repentance and introducing the Messiah, Jesus appeared as the main character of God's salvation history. Jesus came all the way from Nazareth in Galilee to the Jordan River, around 60 miles on foot, in order to be baptized by John (9). Jesus was sinless; he is the Son of God. He had nothing to repent. Why was he baptized by John? It was to recognize God's work through John's ministry in fulfillment of the Scriptures. As the Son of God, Jesus could have started his own independent ministry. But he did not. He humbly submitted to baptism by John in order to fulfill all righteousness (Mt 3:15). We should learn Jesus' humbleness and submission to God's work in history. Another meaning of Jesus' baptism was to identify with sinners. Though he is the Son of God, he humbled himself and became like one of us in every way.

Most importantly, Jesus' baptism was the inauguration of his Messianic ministry. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove (10). Moreover, God

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

the Father spoke from heaven. The Triune God: Father, Son and Spirit, all participated in this great historical event. Thus far, because of sin, the relationship between God and human beings was broken. There was a barrier between heaven and earth. At Jesus' baptism, God himself tore open the barrier and broke into human history in a powerful way. At this moment, as Isaiah had prophesied, the Spirit of the Lord rested upon the Messiah, Jesus—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Isa 11:2). This was Jesus' power source for his Messianic ministry. In Acts 10:38, Peter said, **“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and...he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”** God was pleased with humble Jesus and affirmed, **“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased”** (11). Jesus' intimate love relationship with God was his source of strength and joy, and his motivation in doing God's work.

Third, 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. The author Mark simply tells us that it was the beginning of Jesus' spiritual battle against Satan. Though surrounded by evil and in danger from wild animals, Jesus was not abandoned, for the Holy Spirit was with him and angels attended him (13b). The movie “Rocky” is iconic in our country. 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 BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

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.

Fourth, 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. As a college student, I was enslaved by pride, lust and selfishness and enticed into an ungodly lifestyle. I suffered in my sins with no hope of change. But through the study of Mark’s Gospel, under the shepherd’s care of Pastor Abraham Kim, the Lord enabled me to repent of my sins and accept Jesus as King. Jesus has given me a new history and a new life, which God has blessed abundantly. Anyone who repents and accepts Jesus as Messiah can begin a new history.

THE BEGINNING OF THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS

We can see a glimpse of the kingdom of God in the Garden of Eden. God is at the center, ruling supreme. Everything is orderly and harmonious. People love and respect each other. Peace, love and joy overflow. There is no sorrow, pain or death. But since Adam's fall, the power of sin and Satan have ruled people's hearts and minds. Relationships with God and between people have been broken. Fear, shame and guilt drive people to misery. People constantly complain, make excuses, become murderously jealous and blame others. Each one seeks his own glory, and is filled with deadly pride. People degenerate into mere flesh creatures who only think of physical activities: eating and drinking, marrying, buying and selling, planting and building (Lk 17:27-28). The world is so broken and ruined by sin and the devil that it seems beyond repair. We see many evidences of this in our families that have been broken and in our corrupt society. There seems to be no solution. However, there is a solution. The kingdom of God has come near. When God reigns in our hearts, families and society, he restores everything. All we need to do is repent and believe the good news. Repentance and believing the good news go together. When we repent and believe the good news our sins are forgiven. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts and transforms us from children of darkness into children of light, from children of the devil to children of God. When we repent and believe the good news, we can overcome all kinds of adverse situations and live a victorious life. We can experience the beginning of the good news at this moment, when we repent and believe. Let's pray that we may make a new beginning: personally, as a Christian community, and in our nation by repenting and believing the good news.