

# The Gospel of Mark – Apprenticeship: The invite of discipleship. Mark 1:14-20ff (Expanded Sermon Notes)



Last Sunday, we began our teaching series through the Gospel of Mark. Over the coming months, we will take a long, slow walk through Mark's gospel account. Mark, or as he is also known, John Mark, is the author of this book. Mark and Peter were long ministry partners, and by the time this Gospel was written, they were living and working in Rome. In the conclusion of chapter 1, we will see Mark move with great speed from the wilderness temptation to the calling of the first disciples and then into the healing and teaching ministry of Jesus. If we're not careful, we could think that all of this happens in the span of a few days. But that is not the case, and reading Mark alongside the other Gospels helps to clarify this. In fact, 6-9 months will transpire between 1:15 and 1:16. Being able to understand the timeline helps us to understand the events and the context better. One commenter describes this section as a snapshot of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. He preaches, calls disciples, casts out demons, and heals the sick. But these verses are structured in such a way to show the priority of preaching over healing. Casting out demons and healing the sick function as the proof of the message of Jesus' preaching. When the disciples want Jesus to return to his healing ministry, he declares that they are taking him off mission. He has come out of heaven in order to preach the gospel, not merely to heal the sick.<sup>1</sup> When we take that into account, what do we see in Jesus as the servant messiah? Well, the kingdom wasn't going to be merely about power and authority on earth. It was about something different. It was about proclaiming the good news of salvation and a messiah who came to serve and give his life to make it all happen (cf. 10:45). The central truth we see in this section is that **when you follow Jesus, what is important to him becomes important to you.**

## 1. Repent and Believe (v.15)

- a. Let's start our time in this passage not with the larger context, but with two very important words to Jesus' invitation. → Repent and Believe.
  - i. If you have found yourself in church, even in this church, you have heard these words. They are very common and can fall into the category of "Christianese." That is, words we as believers say so much that we reflexively assume everyone (including ourselves) understands not only the definition of the word, but also the implications. Too often, what happens is that our understanding drifts we morph the definitions and implications over time.
  - ii. So, if we want to understand Jesus' invitation, the first disciples responses, and what it all means for our lives, we need to examine these words. → What do they mean?

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<sup>1</sup> Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 27.

b. **Believe - A change of mind.**

- i. Ok, so, Jesus uses the word, repent, first, so why are we taking believe first? → Because in our Western perspective we logically begin with thinking (the mind) first. We understand that the essence of personhood is the ability to think. With that, we separate thinking and action into two different categories. In the original context, these two ideas were linked together and couldn't be separated. I.e., Two sides of the same coin.
- ii. **See Jesus clearly.** → This is one part of Mark's core purpose or central goal for the readers of his Gospel.
  1. When we come to see Jesus clearly, there is a distinct change of mind that happens not just in relationship to his person and character, but to the implications of his person and character. → I.e., If he truly is who he says he is... then I need to take him and his teachings seriously.

c. **Repent - A change of action (heart).**

- i. Follow him accordingly. → This is the second core purpose or goal for the readers of his Gospel.
    1. This is literally going in the opposite direction I was before. In the context of the Gospel, I was going in the way of self, then I came to see Jesus clearly, so I repent and go in the way of Jesus.
  - ii. Coupled with the command to repent is the command to "believe." If repentance denotes that which one turns *from*, belief denotes that which one turns *to*—the gospel. Both verbs in Greek are present imperatives, that is, they enjoin living in a condition of repentance and belief as opposed to momentary acts. **Repentance and belief cannot be applied to certain areas of life but not to others; rather, they lay claim to the total allegiance of believers.** <sup>2</sup>
- d. **The words repent and believe leave us needing to consider two questions.** → When we are presented with an opportunity to see Jesus clearly, it is also an opportunity to examine other areas of our lives.
- i. **What have I, or am I, truly putting my trust in for my security?**
    1. That's why it goes with the call to believe. Jesus' contemporaries trusted all sorts of things: their ancestry, their land, their Temple, their laws. <sup>3</sup>
    2. In other words, what do I look to in order to feel, ok?
      - a. Finances, relationships, work, food, entertainment, possessions, approval of others, health, etc.
      - b. None of these things are bad in-and-of themselves. But, what happens to me if I lose one of those things, or what I thought would bring me contentment, never is achieved? → I.e., "I never thought life would be like this."
  - ii. What we see in this passages is that like the first disciples, Jesus offers us a different vision for life.
- e. **What is it that I am actively allowing to renew and shape my mind?**
- i. When it comes to the process of repentance and belief, it involves a renewing of our minds. So, not only does Jesus offer us a different vision for life, he transforms us from the inside out and into the vision.

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<sup>2</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 47.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 9–10.

- ii. In this age of information and ideas, what are we leaning into? Does it conform with the picture of Jesus in the NT?
- iii. **Repentance is easier said than done.** How can we possibly change the core of who we are? How can such a deep work happen? Can we just decide to repent and believe? Repentance and faith happen within us, but they do not originate from us. The Bible says that both repentance (2 Timothy 2:25) and faith (Ephesians 2:8–9) are gifts that God must grant.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The call of discipleship. (vv. 16-20)

- a. As we continue to move through this passage, we move from the invitation of Jesus, to those who are being invited.
  - i. How will these fisherman respond to Jesus?
- b. Come and follow... Immediately? → Let's talk about the larger context.
  - i. **14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.** <sup>15</sup> **And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.** → This is what Luke says about this same time period of Jesus' ministry.
    - 1. **In fact, in Luke's Gospel here is what happens between Jesus' exit of the wilderness and the calling of the first disciples. → Teaching in synagogues, claimed to be the Messiah, persecuted in Nazareth, and heals the sick and casts out demons.**
    - 2. **To think that this is the first time they met Jesus, simply isn't the picture the synoptics give us.**
  - ii. **The reality is that Jesus has been in this region for 6-8 months, and likely had previous interactions with Jesus.**
    - 1. **"Immediately"** – is in reference to their obedience and response to the call of Jesus. Not in the timeline of their meeting.
  - iii. The fact that he calls "fisherman" in this region is no surprise. Let alone the fact that he uses a fishing illustration.
    - 1. Mark does not specify where along the lake Jesus called the four. The shoreline in the neighborhood of Capernaum, which presumably was the general location of the call, is a mass of broken black basalt, making for difficult walking and beaching of boats.<sup>5</sup>
    - 2. In the first century fishing was a thriving industry on the Sea of Galilee, which counted no fewer than sixteen bustling ports on the lake and several towns on the northwest shore, including Bethsaida ("house of the fisher"), Magdala ("fish tower"), and Taricheae ("salted fish"), named for the fishing trade. So numerous were fishing boats that Josephus was able to commandeer 230 of them during the war in Galilee in A.D. 68 (*War* 2.635).<sup>6</sup>
- c. **The call of discipleship is to "follow" Jesus. → I.e., To be like Jesus.**

<sup>4</sup> Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 30.

<sup>5</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 48.

<sup>6</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 49.

- i. This was a fairly typical invitation in the first century, however the way Jesus goes about it was atypical.
  - 1. There are no rabbinical stories analogous to the calling of the disciples, for rabbis did not consummate the teacher-student relationship by the summons, “Follow me.” Unlike the decisive call that comes from Jesus, entry into a rabbinical school depended on the initiative of the aspiring student, not the call of a rabbi.<sup>7</sup>
- ii. To be a disciple (follower) of a rabbi was understood that the student saw something compelling in that rabbi and they wanted to emulate their rabbi in every way.
  - 1. The more prominent the rabbi, the more honorable the position of disciple was.
    - a. **Cf. Acts 22:3** – Paul connects his study to Gamaliel one of the most famous rabbis of his time.
- iii. **A second characteristic of the call to discipleship is that it is a call to service.** “ ‘Follow me,’ ” said Jesus, “ ‘and I will make you fishers of men’ ” (1:17). The Greek wording is actually more nuanced, reading, “ ‘I shall make you *become* fishers of men.’ ” The process of becoming disciples of Jesus is a slow and painful one for the Twelve; it is not easy to understand (8:14–21), to watch (14:37), to follow (14:50), to suffer persecution for the cause of Jesus (13:13). **The life to which Jesus calls disciples requires a fundamental change of perspective, to have in mind the things of God rather than self (8:33).**<sup>8</sup>
- d. **Blind faith vs Remarkable faith. → What did they see in Jesus that was worth following?**
  - i. We don’t want to pull the rug out from under them so as to diminish their obedience, nor do we want to put them on a platform that deifies them either.
  - ii. They did not operate with blind faith, they saw something in Jesus that was worth following and they had remarkable faith to follow him. Why? Because the cost to follow was significant and they understood that reality.

### 3. The cost of discipleship. (v. 18, 20)

- a. We often attribute the cost of discipleship to the immediacy of their following, it wasn’t that. Instead, it was the cost of giving up their family ties, resources, and initially even their honor.
  - i. Both pairs of brothers found that obedience to the call of Jesus was costly; it meant abandonment of all that they held dear, and all earthly security, in simple committal to Jesus. Nor can we say that those who left father and hired servants and boat left more than those who left their nets alone, since both left all that they had; **that is always the minimum requirement for the Christian (8:34).**<sup>9</sup>
  - ii. **Generations of fisherman** → “We have no idea how many generations the Zebedee family had been fishing on the sea of Galilee, but it was quite likely a lot more than four. In that country and culture, as in many countries and cultures to this day, a small family business can be handed on not only through generations but through centuries. It’s safe

<sup>7</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 49.

<sup>8</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 50.

<sup>9</sup> R. Alan Cole, [\*Mark: An Introduction and Commentary\*](#), vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 113.

and secure; people know what they're doing. If times are hard, the usual answer is simply to work a bit harder."<sup>10</sup>

iii. **This is not some innocuous invitation to them, it was a radical choice that had significant social implications for them and for their families.**

1. Leave everything you've known, all your security, your family (and family solidarity was hugely important in that culture), and follow Jesus.<sup>11</sup>

b. The Messiah was on the move and they needed to respond.

- i. We must not forget that they are living at a time and in a region where anticipation of the Messiah must have been palpable. Others had come before claiming to be the messiah, but none had come like Jesus. We can't discount the buzz that would have been created by John's ministry, Jesus' baptism, and now Jesus' ministry.

1. It was the good (and extremely dangerous) news that the living God was on the move, was indeed now coming into his kingdom. And it demanded a definite response. It was 'God's **good news**'.<sup>12</sup>

c. **Obedience is the normal operating pattern for the believer.**

- i. This stands in contrast where for so many in our culture where we make obedience optional or a really nice addition or a thing for spiritual giants.

1. That doesn't mean that we are to make obedience a matter of legalism nor a means of salvation. We are saved by grace and purposed for good works (obedience).

- ii. The German theologian Bonhoeffer once put it this way - "**The disciple simply burns his boats and goes ahead. He is called out, and has to forsake his old life in order that he may 'exist' in the strictest sense of the word.**"<sup>13</sup>

1. How does this quote reframe my perspective on obedience?

- iii. The Chinese theologian Watchman Nee talked about obedience this way - "You note that to follow the Lord in the way of the Cross is set before us as His normal, His only way for us."<sup>14</sup>

1. Both men suffered to the point of giving their lives up for the gospel. Their words are a clear and firm call to us to take obedience seriously. It is the same call and perspective that these early disciples had. They understood the stakes and "immediately" followed Jesus.

## 4. The adventure of discipleship. (vv. 21ff)

a. Things are not going to be the same moving forward.

- i. Moving from the shores and fishing to following Jesus, they quickly would find out that nothing is going to be the same anymore.

1. The next part of the narrative showcases more of the Creator's words of command in the way he teaches and the way he casts out demons. The shift in scene is significant. The move from the seashore to the synagogue, and from the

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<sup>10</sup> Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 7–8.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 8–9.

<sup>13</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. "Discipleship and the Cross." In *The Cost of Discipleship*.

<sup>14</sup> Nee, Watchman. Watchman Nee Special Collection : The Normal Christian Church Life and The Normal Christian Life (p. 429). Kindle Edition.

fishermen to the scribes, is a move from the margins of Jewish society to the center.<sup>15</sup>

- ii. What will the disciples begin to see? → Jesus is obedient to the mission the Father called him to.
  - 1. Yes, we can be enamored with the power and authority of Jesus here. That is right and clear in the text. They certainly were. The crowds certainly were. But, there is this deeper theme... **“Follow Jesus accordingly.”**
  - 2. **A needed question – Do I desire to be like Jesus when it comes to the way he obeyed the Father?**
- iii. Bonhoeffer expressed it this way - **"Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will."**<sup>16</sup>
  - 1. Have we reduced following Jesus to a mild morality?
    - a. Yes, avoiding sin is good. But, is there more to obedience?
  - 2. **What does obedience look like for you and me?**
    - a. A commitment to abiding with Christ. → **Only as Jesus is followed can he be known.**<sup>17</sup>
    - b. Available to the prompting of the Spirit.
    - c. Following God's commands in the difficult situations of life.
    - d. Repeating God's truth when we are faced with the lies of the enemies.
    - e. Resisting temptation and not just giving in.
    - f. Reorienting the priorities of my daily life.
    - g. Engaging in right praise of God.

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<sup>15</sup> Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 33.

<sup>16</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *"The Cost of Discipleship."*

<sup>17</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 50.