THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR

Mark 1:1-20

Key Verse: 1:15

"'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and be­lieve the good news!'" (1:15)

The gospel of Jesus is the good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Man's happiness depends on how he responds to the gos­pel of Jesus Christ our Lord. Through Mark's Gospel study, we want to learn how Jesus the Son of God served all kinds of sin­ners. Mark 10:45 says, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ran­som for many." In this pas­sage we learn how the gospel of Jesus began. Today we learn how Jesus began his earthly messianic ministry.

I. John's coming according to prophecy (1-8)

**First,** John's coming was prophesied and fulfilled (1-3). Look at verses 2-3. "It is written in Isaiah the prophet: 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way'--'a voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him."'" This is a prophecy concern­ing John's coming as the forerunner of Je­sus. John came in accor­dance with the proph­ecy and prepared the way for Jesus by preach­ing repen­tance to God to those waiting for the coming of the Messi­ah. Mark's motive in introducing the prophecy of Isaiah is to empha­size the fact that the gospel is not a theory or a man-made story, but the ful­fill­ment of God's prophecies in history. In brief, the gospel is based on God's words, through the process of pro­phecies and their fulfillment, and it is based on the col­lection of facts and events in his­to­ry. These days many people believe Charles Dar­win's "theory" as if it were the truth. But a theory is only an assump­tion, which is virtually nothing but one man's idea. But truth is truth, based on historical facts and events. Our God is the God of history, who works out his purposes through the pro­cess of history. It is a process di­rected by the God who sees the end in the be­ginning. And we are within that pro­cess, togeth­er with John the Baptist and Jesus, and because of this, we can either help it or hinder it. We cannot deny the authenticity and historicity of the gospel. For example, Nero was the Em­peror of the Roman Empire, but in view of history he is regard­ed as a come­dian. On the other hand, the gospel is an old, old story which has endured a long time in history. Still it remains the unchang­ing truth. Even now, there are so many people who believe the Bible is the living word of God as in the past. It will be so in the future until our Lord Jesus comes again in glory and power.

**Second,** John's message (4-5). What did John do as the fore­run­ner of the Messiah? As was prophesied, he prepared for Je­sus' gospel work. How did he prepare? He prepared the way by preaching a baptism of repen­tance for the forgiveness of sins (4). John said to the people who came to him, "Re­pent!" In this case, "repent" meant, "Pre­pare your hearts to accept Jesus as the Savior of the world." If they repented, John baptized them with water as the declaration that they were the children of God. But it was nothing but the expression of cleansing, so that they might be ready to receive Jesus' cleansing of their sins with the Holy Spirit.

How did the people respond when John preached a baptism of re­pen­tance for the forgiveness of sins? 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." It is amazing to see that people from every cor­ner of the country re­sponded to John's mes­sage and came and confessed their sins, beat­ing their chests. Outwardly, peo­ple looked unlikely to re­pent and con­fess their sins to re­ceive John's bap­tism. They were willing to solve their sin problem. But by the bad influ­ence of those who are like Freud, who claimed that there was no such thing as a guilty con­science, people hard­en their hearts and are unwilling to come to Je­sus. Rather, they go to psychia­trists and psychol­ogists to soothe their tormented souls.

**Third,** John's pious life (6). When John prepared for Jesus' gospel work he had his own personal lifestyle. Look at verse 6. "John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey." John the Baptist lived in a most simple way as a servant of God. He lived in the desert, a desert full of limestones and warped, twisted rock formations. John lived in the desert where he could give himself to the voice of God. He did not live in a city where there were many good apart­ments, as well as the loud voices of Satan. He ate lo­custs and wild honey. He was not a slave of physical desires of any kind. He wore a camel's hair garment, which served as clo­thing by day and as a blanket by night. He lived a pure life. His pure life in the desert was his power source to be a ser­vant of God. Piety is the starting point of knowing the Holy God.

**Fourth,** John wit­nesses that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit (7-8). Look at verse 7. "And this was his mes­sage: 'After me will come one more pow­erful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.'" Here John makes it very clear that he is a mere man, and that Jesus is the Son of God. John the Baptist was the most influen­tial man of his times. But with complete self-efface­ment and obvious yieldedness, he hum­bled himself to the position of a ser­vant to magnify Jesus as the Son of God.

John the Baptist also witnessed that Jesus is God who baptizes peo­ple with the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 8. "I bap­tize you with water, but he will bap­tize you with the Holy Spirit." John admitted that he was a mere man who could only baptize people with water for cere­monial clean­sing, but John proclaimed that Jesus is God who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Why is it not enough to receive a wa­ter baptism? Why is it so nec­essary to receive the baptism of the Holy Spir­it? It is because when Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spir­it, all evil spirits go away from us and we can be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us true rest and joy. We must witness that Jesus is God. We must witness that Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit.

II. Jesus begins his earthly Messianic ministry (9-20)

**First,** Jesus receives baptism from John the Baptist (9-11). In verses 9-13 we learn how Jesus prepared himself before be­ginning the gospel work. Look at verse 9. "At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Gali­lee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." Jesus' baptism by John was not a baptism of repen­tance, for he was sinless (Heb 4:15). But Jesus re­ceived John's baptism anyway. Why did Jesus receive John's baptism? Jesus received John's bap­tism in order to take over John's work so as to verify that God's work of salvation is being continued. For example, Jesus could have ig­nored the work of John and started his own work newly. But he humbly received bap­tism from John in order to succeed him in God's redemp­tive work and histo­ry. Jesus is truly obedient to God and humble to men. There is no one-man show in God's work and history. God's work can be done when all people work togeth­er in God. The work and history of God is that of Abraham, David and Jesus and that of John the Bap­tist and Jesus, and that of each of us who has the sense of history.

Most importantly, Jesus' baptism by John was the inau­guration cere­mony of the Messiah. Look at verses 10,11. "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descend­ing on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" This was the inaugural speech for Jesus the Savior of the world. The inaugural cere­mony was the most impor­tant histori­cal event to God and to all hu­man­kind. At the inaugu­ral ceremony, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus like a dove. The dove is thought to be the symbol of peace. As the Messiah of the world, he would con­quer the world. But his conquest would be one of the heart and one of love. His conquest would be by the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Messi­ah who was anointed by the Holy Spirit, not by the sword. God or­dained Jesus per­sonally as the Savior of the world. This inauguration of Jesus always renewed his spirit during the time of his earthly Mes­sianic work. We also must come to God and renew our spirit that we are ordained by God and that we are cho­sen ones and we are shep­herds of God's flock. Kings and queens and presidents are ordained by men. Therefore, those who are chosen by God as his servants must have the convic­tion that "I am or­dained by God, not by men."

**Second,** Jesus defeated Satan by the prayer of 960 hours (12-13). Look at verses 12-13. "At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild ani­mals, and angels attended him." Jesus had to fight with Satan before he began his public ministry. It was because the first man, Adam, was defeat­ed by Satan's temptation, and then the world was cursed. There­fore, the first thing Jesus had to do was chal­lenge Satan, who had defeat­ed Adam. In order to fight against Satan, Jesus did not use his ability, even though he is the Son of God. Jesus depended totally on God through 40 days of fasting prayer. Napoleon Bonaparte became a military genius when he did not sleep or eat for 76 hours and con­quered the Austro-Rus­sian allied army, which was ten times bigger than his army of 10,000 sol­diers. When Jesus went out into the desert, the battle with Satan was not a battle quick­ly won. This battle lasted forty days--960 long hours. Jesus had to fight all by himself as the second Adam. In this we learn that hu­man life is a spiri­tual battle with Satan.

These days godless men do their best to ignore the exis­tence of Sa­tan. But the strange phenome­non is that all of them become de­voted Sa­tan worshipers. Verse 13b says that Jesus was with the wild ani­mals. The pow­er of Satan seemed to be pre­vail­ing. Jesus did all his best and was at the point of fall­ing to the ground. At that moment, God helped him through his an­gels to overcome the temptation of Satan. Here we learn that we should not give up fight­ing against Satan to the end.

**Third,** Jesus began his ministry (14-15). Look at verse 14. "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God." Jesus began his gospel ministry when evil men beheaded the righteous (Mk 6:18,19, 26-29). The times were so evil that it was a most unlikely time for anyone to start any work, much less start gospel work. But Jesus be­gan his gospel work in that terrible situ­ation. Jesus teaches us here that we can do gospel ministry in any circumstance by faith. The fact that Jesus began his gospel ministry in the horri­ble circumstances of those times gives us new hope for praying for Ameri­ca, that God would establish the kingdom of priests and a holy na­tion.

What was Jesus' message when he began his gospel work? Look at verse 15. "'The time has come,' he said. 'The king­dom of God is near. Re­pent and believe the good news!'" What did Jesus say first to people in order to deliver the gospel message? He said, "The king­dom of God is near." What a beau­tiful message! What an everlasting message to those who were suffer­ing in the temporal world where everything perishes, spoils and fades away. Jesus' message, "The kingdom of God is near," is the best message because it gives us a living hope in this despairing time. There­fore the kingdom of God is a living hope for all humankind. Jesus also said, "Repent and believe" as the conditions for enter­ing the kingdom of God. We must stop the lives of sin and turn our hearts to God. This is the real mean­ing of repen­tance. There­fore, in pro­claiming the gos­pel of Jesus we must first give all peo­ple a living hope in the kingdom of God and help them gradu­ally repent and be­lieve.

**Fourth,** the gospel work began with the choosing of disciples (16-20). At the beginning of his gospel work, Jesus chose his disci­ples. Look at vers­es 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. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.'" Je­sus' calling fisher­men as his disciples seemed to be too weak compared with the pow­er of this world. But from the beginning of his gos­pel work, Jesus called disciples from among fishermen and ordinary men and raised them as fu­ture spiritual leaders. From the worldly point of view, Jesus started an obvious losing business. But from God's point of view, his losing busi­ness was the most important business for God. To raise sever­al men would not seem to change world history much. But Jesus believed that God would change the world through them. Jesus should be our stan­dard and princi­ple. How can we raise good disciples? If a shepherd is a good disciple, he can raise good disci­ples. How many can he raise? At least 12 disciples to 120 disciples, as Je­sus did.

What was their response to Jesus' calling? Look at verse 20. "With­­out delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him." When Jesus determined to raise disci­ples, God allowed him several people as his disci­ples.

May God help us to have faith in the kingdom of God through re­pen­tance and faith and serve others with the mes­sage, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" May God help you to be a disciple of Jesus at the beginning of your life of faith so that you can be a shepherd of this nation.