

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 quick-

ly 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.