

**Jesus' Strategy for Effective Ministry**

Scripture: Mark 1:12–20

Code: 41-4

Let's open our Bibles to Mark chapter 1...Mark chapter 1. We are really blessed and privileged to be going through the gospel of Mark. I'm sure someone might say, "You have just taken your people ten years through Luke and now you're going back through Mark? The same story of the Lord Jesus Christ." And I would answer to say yes, we've been through Matthew, we've been through John, we've been through Luke and now we're going through Mark...and if there were four more gospels, we'd go through them because the glories of Christ are inexhaustible. The facets of His majesty, the wonder of His person cannot be contained. Every perspective, every viewpoint enriches us profoundly. Never get enough of the Lord Jesus Christ, and He, of course is the theme of these gospels. We are determined to move a little faster through Mark. It would not be uncommon for me to take the passage we're going to take this morning and preach as many as eight to ten messages on it. I have done that in the past with great delight and joy. But this is a different approach that we're taking in Mark, a little bit of a wider view of things in order that we might move at the speed Mark wants us to move who, as I told you, uses the word immediately about a dozen times in chapter 1, just to make sure we keep moving. And we certainly will do that.

Let me read the text for us this morning. It is Mark 1 verse 12 through verse 20. "Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness and He was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan. And He was with the wild beasts and the angels were ministering to Him. Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came in to Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, 'The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel.' As He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow Me and I will make you become fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed Him. Going on a little farther, He saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother who were also in the boat mending the nets. Immediately He called them and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and went away to follow Him."

Now just reading that, you have to understand that there are some very sweeping omissions. You have the account of the temptation of Jesus Christ in verses 12 and 13 and Mark gives us no record of what the temptation was. In Matthew you have a very detailed presentation of the facets of temptation that came against Christ and how Christ answered them. You have the same thing in Luke. Mark you get a very rapid comment on the temptation. The temptation of Christ is then followed here by the ministry of Christ beginning in Galilee. In order to get to that, Mark has skipped

over is initial ministry in the south, in Judea and Jerusalem, a ministry that overlapped the ongoing ministry of John the Baptist, a ministry that included, for example, the cleansing of the temple in John 2 where Jesus launched His ministry and other miracles as well.

And Mark skipped the movement of Jesus when He left Judea and went north through Samaria, as recorded in John 4 and accounted the Samaritan woman and disclosed Himself as the Messiah to this half-breed outcast woman. And Mark picks up the ministry when Jesus finally arrives in Galilee. So many events and much time has passed between the temptation of Christ and the Galilee ministry.

And then seemingly without a connection to what has just been said in verse 16, Mark records Jesus' calling of the first four disciples, or Apostles. And the question comes, why does Mark pull these things together the way He does? Why these brief little vignettes almost? And the answer is, because Mark is endeavoring to establish something for us. We now know that Jesus is the new King. This is the book that is written, verse 1 says, to be the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God. It is the annunciation that the new King has arrived, God's King, the anointed one, the Messiah, the Savior, the Son of God, Jesus Christ has come. This is His story.

And as the story begins, all Mark wants to do is get the ground work laid down. The first important thing that happens to Christ is His baptism. This is His coronation as the new King from heaven. The Father says, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The Holy spirit descends, settles upon Him, empowers Him, fills Him for the rest of His life and the Holy Spirit becomes the intermediary between His divine nature and His human nature so that the two are blended together by the power of the Holy Spirit. He is now Spirit-empowered. He is now granted divine authority. This is His crowning, this is His coronation, this is His inauguration.

What comes out of that is His authority. Mark then immediately wants to demonstrate that authority. And in the three paragraphs that I read you, He demonstrates the authority of Christ over three realms. One, over Satan and his realm. Two, over sin and its dominion. Three, over sinners.

It is important for us to know that if the new King is going to take His throne, if the new King is going to reign, if the new King is going to overthrow the usurper, the temporary king, Satan himself, and if the King is going to conquer Satan and sin and sinners, He has to demonstrate the power to do that. And so, that's where Mark establishes His authority. First in His temptation, His authority over Satan becomes clear. And then in His preaching, His authority over sin becomes clear because He preaches the good news that if you repent and believe, you will be forgiven and enter His Kingdom.

He can overpower and will overpower Satan. He can overpower and will overpower sin. And thirdly, He can and will overpower the souls of sinners, and that is illustrated in the fact that out of nowhere He approaches four men and lays a command on them which they immediately and instantly

obey...at immense cost and sacrifice to them. So this is what is established in these three little paragraphs.

But beyond that, there are some implications of this that I think are helpful for us. Jesus also gives us a model of what a faithful minister looks like. He gives us a model of how ministry is to be done. If you want to do ministry effectively, here's the pattern. Victory over Satan, victory over Satan...essential. A clear message. And thirdly, team work. These things are behind the front page, if you will, but very important for us. This then becomes a model for ministry that we really need to understand. While on the one hand we're seeing the authority of Christ demonstrated, on the other hand, we're looking at Christ's own strategy. Certainly no lack of strategies are espoused today. No lack of strategies are offered today for successful ministry, they're nearly endless. Every new entrepreneur has the newest novelty for crowd gathering and popularity. Every new trend trumps the old trend and if you're trying to keep up, it's impossible because by the time you told your people you're going to do it differently and you've worked through the process to get to the new trend, it's obsolete and everybody is playing catch up.

What foolishness, frankly, it is to chase methods, superficial stylized approaches related to societal preferences and cultural fads. There is a model for ministry bound up in this section of Scripture that never ever changes. It is the Lord's strategy for effective ministry launched in fulfillment of His own divine calling and Mark lays it out for us in these three paragraphs. They are brief. They are selective. They are fast-paced in classic style that Mark writes.

Now they may seem on the surface unrelated. They are not unrelated, as I just pointed out. They are carefully selected by the Holy Spirit to get the essential pieces in place that produce an effective ministry. Our Lord establishes His might, His Kingdom might over Satan. He establishes His Kingdom message which is a message that indicates His power over sin. And He establishes His Kingdom means which is to advance the Kingdom through men..through men and women.

So I want to bring out three points. I don't always give you a little outline that's alliterated but once in a while it's kind of fun to have one. What makes for effective ministry?

One, sanctity of soul, let's call it sanctity of soul.

Number two, simplicity of subject.

And number three, selectivity of successors.

Sanctity of soul, simplicity of subject and selectivity of successors. Mark packs these three little paragraphs with action that sets the components for all effective ministry.

Now this is immediately after the baptism. Verses 9 to 11 describe the baptism, the coronation, the inauguration, the long-awaited moment Christ had been waiting for 30 years to get to the moment where the ministry was launched and He receives that launch in that glorious divine affirmation and coronation at His baptism. It is followed immediately by Mark's account of our Lord's temptation by Satan. This is to establish the fact that the new King has the power to establish His Kingdom though there is a great formidable supernatural adversary, Satan. And so we see, first of all, sanctity of soul.

The question is, can the Son of God meet and conquer His archenemy? Can the Son of God go through the most alluring assault that Satan can devise? He will never be able to establish His Kingdom if He cannot overthrow the usurper, if He cannot conquer Satan. He must be able to crush the serpent's head, in the language of Genesis 3:15, He must be able to destroy the works of the devil, as John put it, if He is going to establish His Kingdom, for Satan currently reigns and rules in the world. We will see here that He has the power to overcome Satan in the most alluring and seductive time of temptation, at His very weakest in the most isolated circumstance imaginable. He shows His power over Satan and gives us a model of the importance of doing Kingdom work with a pure heart.

So as we come to verses 12 and 13, just a thought before we look at them. The majestic glorious coronation has just happened. You might expect something heavenly to happen, like angels singing, or something. Or you might expect some kind of celebration. You might expect perhaps a doxology that extols the glories of Christ. But no, you can't even catch your breath. You go from the coronation to the temptation with nothing in between. Immediately after His baptism, He is led into conflict with Satan, the archenemy of God and of all divine purposes. No time to relish the glory of the baptism. No time to bask in the long-awaited hour of His commissioning. No time to enjoy the wonderful affirming words of the Father. No time to relish the joy of the union with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is thrown into a fierce assault by the devil and that's how verse 12 begins...Immediately, euthus again in the Greek, about a dozen times in the first chapter. "Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness."

The Spirit is the Holy Spirit who has now taken over control of His life, who has filled Him, He is full of the Holy Spirit, Luke 4:1 says. This is the third mention of the Holy Spirit who is the power behind all that Jesus will do. And Mark doesn't give us the reason why the Holy Spirit impelled Him into the wilderness, but Matthew 4:1 does. Matthew 4:1 says, "The Holy Spirit did this so that Jesus would be tempted by the devil."

Very strong verb in verse 12, impelled, ekballo, to throw out, literally threw Jesus out, strong compulsion. This is the will of God. Jesus is not resistant, that's not what it's saying. He's not reluctant. But the Holy Spirit is now in control. The Holy Spirit who controls His life in fulfillment of God's plan literally throws Him out into the wilderness.

Please don't misunderstand this. God is not the tempter, the Holy Spirit is not the tempter; James 1 says God tempts no man. God cannot be tempted. He cannot tempt. But God will allow His own to be tempted in order that through the victory in that temptation they may triumph. The temptation then is not by chance, it is not by whim, it is not by the will of Satan. It is not what Satan planned. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit in the plan of God.

Why in the wilderness? Couldn't that temptation come somewhere else? Sure, it could have come in Jerusalem. In one of the temptations that the devil brings to Jesus, He actually takes Him to Jerusalem. Why the wilderness? Why the desert? Because Jesus is here away from everyone and everything. He has gone from the exalted highest moment of His coronation at His baptism, among the massive crowds that were surrounding John the Baptist in His baptizing in the river Jordan. He's gone from the crowds to absolute and total isolation in the desert. The Father has commended Him, the Spirit has empowered Him. John the Baptist has declared Him to be the Messiah and the Savior, the Lamb of God. He is full of the Holy Spirit. He is in total consciousness of His personhood and His divine mission. His wholly humanity is filled with power and wisdom and truth. His soul is rushed with joy. After waiting for 30 years, He is about to launch. And just at that highest moment, the Holy Spirit literally throws Him into the desert into a conflict with Satan.

Why was the wilderness chosen? Because He's going to have to handle Satan on His own, nobody around Him, no support, nobody to help Him through the temptation, nobody to pray with Him, pray for Him, nobody to comfort Him, no one to encourage Him. He is absolutely alone. He must demonstrate the power over Satan with no help. Most likely the historians say this would be in the area called Yeshimon. George Adam Smith called it "the devastation." It's an area say 35 miles by 15 miles, wild, severe, uninhabited, could be the area very near the road from Jericho to Jerusalem which is a really scary road. I've been on it a number of times, dangerous area. Rocky, craggy peaks and cliffs with frightening ravines and shear walls of cliffs that plunge hundreds of feet into these ravines. I have driven on that road when it was dirt in a very rickety bus. But in those days there weren't any people in that area. There weren't any people traversing that area off the trail and so it was an area where He would be absolutely all alone. Deuteronomy 8:15 speaks of the terrible great wilderness with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there is no water.

So Jesus will be tempted, unlike Adam. Adam was tempted in a paradise. Adam was tempted in a lush place. Adam was tempted in the companionship of Eve and Adam fell. Christ is tempted in utter isolation in a place that has most felt the curse, that is the most opposite of Eden of any place in the world, an absolute dangerous, barren desert. Verse 13 further describes it, in the middle of the verse, as "A place where He was with the wild beasts." And Mark here is dramatizing the danger of that place, but he's also saying there weren't people there because people don't live where wild beasts live and wild beasts eventually go where people aren't. This is intended to describe the danger, but even more intended to describe the isolation in this place.

If you read through the Old Testament, you will find that there are places in the Old Testament that describe the kind of things that lived in that place. I just read you from Deuteronomy 8 which talks about scorpions and serpents, but the Old Testament speaks of lions being in the Judean wilderness of wild pigs who were very dangerous, of wolves, foxes, jackals, panthers, and who knows whatever else. But this is not a place where people lived. This is an ominous dangerous uninhabitable place full of wild animals.

Now Mark doesn't tell us what Matthew and Luke tell us and that is this, that Jesus went without food for the entire 40 days. Matthew 4:2, Luke 4:2, He didn't eat for 40 days. Forty-day fasts had happened before. According to Exodus chapter 34, Moses had a 40-day fast. According to 1 Kings 19, Elijah had a 40-day fast. That's a long time, almost six weeks of eating nothing. Verse 13 says He was in the wilderness 40 days, being tempted by Satan. Forty days alone, 40 days in isolation, 40 days in a dangerous, devastating place. Forty days without anything to eat. So you have no support system, no one to help Him, no one to comfort Him, no one to instruct Him, no one to encourage Him and He is at His lowest possible physical condition. His strength would be gone long before the sixth week. It would begin to diminish seriously the second week. But if He is the King, He must be able alone at His weakest to conquer the enemy. And so the Holy Spirit throws Him into that conflict.

He is not only to be a King, and this is what you want to keep in mind, He is a King and He is reigning over His people now and He will reign over the earth and over all the new heaven and the new earth in eternity. He is a King, He will always reign and He will ultimately and finally reign over everything. But He is also a suffering servant. And while as a King He is exalted as a suffering servant, He is humiliated. The new King is also the suffering servant, it is a paradox, it is a paradox. The most exalted one is the one who suffers most. Wandering in that place alone for nearly six weeks with nothing to eat in the wilderness, He is tempted the whole time by Satan. Some people assume that He was only tempted at the end of the 40 days. While the temptations that came at the end of the 40 days are given in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, but here we are told He was tempted the whole time...the whole time. And the interesting thing about the temptation Mark doesn't describe, he leaves that to Matthew and to Luke, the interesting thing about the temptation was that the temptation was never a temptation for Him to give up His sovereignty. It was never a temptation to give up His royalty, if you will. It was never a temptation for Him to give up His rights and His privileges and His honor and His exaltation and His elevation. It was a temptation for Him to abandon His humiliation.

And if you read Matthew 4, first half of the chapter, first part of the chapter, Luke 4, the first part of the chapter, you remember the temptations. First one, you're hungry, turn those stones into bread. Why? Satan says, "You're the Son of God, You are the King, You are God the Son. You are the anointed one, You are the Messiah." Satan affirms that. "You are privileged, You should have honor. You should have respect. You should not hunger. Do not accept this humiliation." Satan did not want to tempt Christ to abandon His kingship, to abandon His exaltation, but rather to abandon His

humiliation because Satan wanted to keep Him from the cross because the cross was necessary as a sacrifice for sin if He ever was to be ultimately the true King. If He didn't go to the cross, He wouldn't have anybody to reign over. So in the end, it was an attack on His Kingship. But in the beginning it was to call Him to abandon His humiliation. "Turn those stones into bread, You have a right to eat, You're the Son of God."

Took Him in to a high mountain, showed Him the kingdoms of the world. He said, "I'm now in control of these kingdoms of the world. If You bow down to me, I'll give them to you. You have a right to them. You're the heir. You have a right to the Kingdoms of the world. You can have the kingdoms of the world, just worship me." This is an appeal to His dominion, this is appealing to His exaltation, to His elevation, to His honor, to His glory, to His Sonship. "You're the Son of God, You shouldn't hunger. You're the Son of God, You should rule as the Son of God." This is a temptation to abandon humiliation which involved hunger and which involved being rejected and hated and vilified and beaten and crucified, rather than exalted.

And then, thirdly, he took Him to the pinnacle of the temple, probably the southeast corner where there was a plunge to the ground below of several hundred feet. He said, "Why don't you just jump off? You jump off and make a soft landing and everybody will bow down to You and You'll have no humiliation, You'll have no rejection. They'll all embrace You as Messiah." All the appeals were for Him to take what was rightly given to Him at His baptism, the honor, the authority, the dignity, the exaltation and hold on to it and abandon His humiliation. That was the temptation.

Could He withstand it? Could He handle it? Could He survive it? Would He hang on to His privilege? Would He hang on to His honor? It was natural to Him as natural as natural can be to a supernatural being, it belonged to Him. It was His by right. It was who He was. It was all He had ever known, all He had ever known from all eternity was honor and glory.

By the way, this is not the beginning of temptation for Jesus. Hebrews 4:15 says He was tempted in all points like as we are. He was tempted the way any human being is tempted from birth through His death. He was tempted the way little children are tempted and older children and teenagers and young adults and adults, He was tempted all the way along at all points like we are, yet without sin. This is not the only temptation. This is just the culmination of temptation based upon His established authority. And now that He is identified as the Son of God, as the Messiah, the anointed one, the new King, the Savior and all of that, that has been affirmed and established and is about to launch His ministry, Satan wants to divert Him from that by having Him grasp and cling to His privilege and abandon humiliation.

This is not by any means the first temptation, nor is it the last...nor is it the last. He said to His disciples, Luke 22:28, "You've been with Me through My temptations." They went on after this. The other writers of the gospels tell us that Satan went away for a little while until he had another

opportune time. We also know that He was tempted in the Garden. According to Mark chapter 14 verse 32 and following which is called by Luke in Luke 22:53 “the hour of the power of darkness” that He was again assaulted in the Garden as He anticipated the cross. But never has He been tempted like this. Never in this kind of isolation, never with this kind of physical weakness, never with this kind of massive onslaught that is literally based upon what has just happened, namely His great coronation. Never has He been tempted like this because it is at that coronation that everything is established as to who He is.

And Satan immediately goes after that, but the Holy Spirit wills it to be so, the Holy Spirit is the one who makes the conflict happen. If the new King is to be triumphant, then the reader has to know that He can conquer Satan, right? You have to know that. You have to know that if He's going to have to establish His Kingdom, He has to be able to conquer Satan, He has to be able to conquer sin because sin is the problem. And He has to be able to conquer sinners and turn them into disciples. And it all starts with conquering the reigning adversary Satan himself, the powerful demon ruler who opposes God and all His purposes.

Well what will He do? How did He come out of the temptation? You remember it, Matthew and Luke tell us every time He was tempted, at the end of the 40 days, those three final temptations, He responded by quoting Scripture, right? Deuteronomy three times He quoted Scripture and rejected the temptation.

Mark doesn't tell us that. Mark's only final comment comes at the end of verse 13, “And the angels were ministering to Him.” The angels were ministering to Him. It says in Matthew 4:11, “Then the devil left Him and behold, angels came to minister to Him.” The word “minister” is a word that means to serve food. How did the angels minister to Him? They fed Him after 40 days of fasting, they gave Him something to eat. But I think they ministered in another way as well. I think they brought by their very presence and the food a confirmation of the Father. This was God's way of saying “I am still well pleased.” The divine approval of His holy wholly triumph over Satan and fierce temptation is signaled by God sending holy angels to minister to Him at the end in the exhaustion of His victory. And, of course, His subsequent life and ministry make His holiness beyond argument, but here is holiness was assaulted unsuccessfully and Satan threw everything he had at Him. And so Jesus will go forth in power over Satan, first miracle we're going to see next time, verses 21 to 28 is a miracle in which He exhibits His power over Satan's realm. He has power over Satan clearly and He demonstrates it all through His ministry, all through His life.

But here's the first thing to learn about ministry. Effective ministry is done by those who triumph over temptation. Effective ministry is done by those who triumph over temptation and sin. We don't triumph over it in the sense that our Lord Jesus did, but in the sense that a faithful...a faithful servant of the Lord does. That is why the Apostle Paul could say that when he was criticized in his ministry, “Our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience that in holiness and godly sincerity, not



in fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially toward you.” Paul says my life is marked by holiness and godly sincerity. And Paul tells Timothy, 2 Timothy 2:20 and following, “In a great house there are different kinds of vessels, some to honor, some to dishonor. You want to be a vessel unto honor, fit for the Master's use, cleanse yourselves, flee youthful lusts, pursue righteousness and faithfulness and love and peace with a pure heart.” God blesses and empowers a pure servant. Effective ministry is done by sanctity of soul, those who enter into the triumph of Christ are those who walk in obedience and holiness before Him.

Secondly, effective ministry not only involves sanctity of soul, but simplicity of subject. Our Lord wants to demonstrate here that He has power over sin and the gospel is that display of power over sin. Verses 14 and 15, “After John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel.” He is saying, “I offer you a place in the Kingdom, a place in the eternal Kingdom, the Kingdom of salvation, the sphere of forgiveness if you repent and believe. The gospel is the good news that God forgives sinners and takes them into His everlasting Kingdom when they repent of their sin and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So here He finally goes public. Now remember, I told you time has passed...time has passed. His baptism is long behind Him, many, many months behind Him. He has been in Judea cleansing the temple, ministering there. And now He has finally gone to Galilee. But He doesn't really launch His ministry there until after John has been taken into custody. Six months or more after Jesus' baptism, John was arrested by Herod. A year later, his head was chopped off. It was after John was taken into custody that Jesus came into Galilee. Prior to that, John was still baptizing in the Jordan and Jesus was ministering in Judea and their two ministries overlapped. You read about the overlap in John 1, 2 and 3, the gospel of John. And you will hear John the Baptist say, “I must decrease, He must increase,” and God saw to that by taking him off the scene, having him arrested.

The story of John the Baptist's arrest is a fascinating one, and Mark will tell it in chapter 6. So we'll get to that story. But he makes no comment on that here because he's following Jesus and the ministry of Jesus. So Mark skips the early ministry of Jesus in Judea, Mark skips His transient across Samaria and has Him end up finally in Galilee. And so, he says, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God. Galilee was the northern part of the land of Israel, the hinterlands, the outskirts, far from the religious center in Jerusalem. The fact that Jesus really launched His ministry in full power there was a testimony to the apostasy of the core, the corruption of Jerusalem.

But please notice the simplicity of subject, preaching the gospel of God. Somebody said God only had one Son, and He was a preacher. God had one method, and that was preaching. The preaching of the cross was to them that perish foolishness, but to those who believe it is the power of God. Preaching is the means that God ordained, proclamation heralding the good news. And what is the good news? The gospel of God he calls it, the good news of salvation. What do you mean the

gospel of God? I thought it was the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Well it is. It is the gospel about the Lord Jesus Christ but it is the gospel of God in the sense that God is the source of it. The gospel from God. It is not the idea that the gospel is about God, although certainly it is about Him and about His manifestation in Christ, but it is the gospel that comes from God about Jesus Christ. The gospel of God is a common New Testament term, Romans 1:1, Romans 15:16, 2 Corinthians 11:7, 1 Thessalonians 2:2, 8 and 9, 1 Peter 4:17 refer to the gospel of God.

I love the simplicity of this. Jesus came preaching the good news from God. The message that we have for the world is from God. I mean, how basic is that, right? So when you're going to do ministry, what you do is you repeat the message that came from God. This is not about analyzing the culture. This is not about finding people's psychological hot buttons. This is not about seeking people's interest. This is not about devising a message that somehow meets with what they want. We come as heralds announcing a message from God. That's what we do. And, this is the message. It is the good news, it is good news, it is the best news the world has ever heard. And what is it? Verse 15, it is this, "The time is fulfilled," the kairos, not the chronos, not clock time, not calendar time, epochal time...the era, the fixed point in history for an event to happen. Or in the words of Galatians 4:4, "The fullness of time." The administration of the fullness of time, it's called in Ephesians 1:10. God's sovereign moment. The significant hour in human history. This is it for which the world has long waited, the most significant era in the world's history, the arrival of the Savior who will pay the penalty for sin and thus provide salvation for all who have believed from the beginning of history to the end.

The time is fulfilled. This is God's great epochal moment. The promises of the Old Testament regarding Messiah, the promises regarding the Kingdom, the promises of salvation are about to be fulfilled. What is the message? That Christ has come not only to conquer Satan but to conquer sin...to conquer sin through the gospel. The new King has arrived and with Him the Kingdom. The Kingdom is here because the King is here. Wherever the King is present, the Kingdom is. Jesus' message, very simple, unmistakable...the Kingdom of God is at hand, here it is. I'm here, the Kingdom's here.

When He was in Nazareth in Galilee, Luke 4, just after His temptation, right at this same time, goes in to the synagogue and He says, "Today this prophecy is fulfilled in your ears." And He was talking about the Messianic prophecy from Isaiah 61. It is the message, the good news, God's hour has come, the Kingdom is here because the King is here. How do you enter that Kingdom? Repent and believe in the gospel...writes Mark...repent of your sin, believe in the gospel, the good news concerning Jesus Christ.

How are we to understand the Kingdom? Three dimensions...spiritual kingdom, millennial kingdom, eternal kingdom. It is a kingdom that is now and not yet, that is invisible and later visible. That's the simple way to understand the Kingdom.

First time Jesus comes, the King comes, and because the King is here, His Kingdom is here. He preaches the gospel of salvation. He establishes, listen, His invisible spiritual Kingdom in the hearts of all who believe all over the world. That's going on right now, isn't it still? The Kingdom all over the world, you're a part of the Kingdom by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is your King, He rules you and He rules all who belong to Him. When you became a Christian, you came into His Kingdom, you're a part of His Kingdom. To seek Christ is to seek the Kingdom and His righteousness. And to receive everything else, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. That's the spiritual sense of the Kingdom.

In the future, there will be an earthly Kingdom that Revelation 20 says will last a thousand years in which all the promises of the Old Testament that were to be fulfilled in the land and worldwide righteousness and salvation and all of those elements of Old Testament millennial prophecies come to their fruition and fulfillment. That's coming in the future, that's not yet.

Then after that is the last phase of the Kingdom which lasts forever, the New Heaven and the New Earth where Christ reigns forever and ever as King of kings and Lord of Lords. The first time He comes to establish the spiritual Kingdom. The second time He comes, to establish the millennial Kingdom, followed by the eternal Kingdom. But if you're a Christian, He's your King, is that right? "King of my life I crown Thee now, Thine shall the glory be." Don't we sing that? The Kingdom is present because the King is present. The King is present in your life, you're part of His Kingdom. He's your King and He's building His spiritual Kingdom until He returns a second time to establish His earthly reign and then His eternal reign. You are Christ's and you belong to His Kingdom. The Kingdom belongs to you. It is inseparable from Him.

How do you get into the Kingdom? Repent and believe the gospel. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repent and believe the gospel. At this point, if a reader is reading this and doesn't yet know the story, he has to keep reading so he can understand the full range of the gospel, right? He's got to get to the cross and then the resurrection. But Mark says, once you know the gospel, you repent, metanoeo which means turn and go the opposite way. Turn around and go the opposite way. Turn away from your sin, believe. Very strong emphasis on believe in the gospel of Mark, as in the other gospels. Put your trust in Christ. This is an objective kind of repentance. You...you...you in the words of Acts 20, repent toward God and put your faith in Jesus Christ. This is not just a nebulous faith, this is a very objective faith in the person of Jesus Christ and His work.

So I say, effective in the gospel is the power over sin that for anybody who comes to the King and repents and believes the gospel, sin is conquered, sin's power is broken, sin's presence will some day be eliminated. Jesus does have power over sin as well as power over Satan.

And then looking at the ministry side of it, effective ministry is modeled here in the fact that there's no complex message. There's no complex message. There's no mixed subject. There's no confusion about what the subject is. Jesus came preaching the gospel of God, the good news from heaven which is now revealed in Scripture and that is why we say all ministry that is faithful comes right out of the Word of God and it is a proclamation of the provision of salvation through faith in Christ. Faithful ministers focus on the gospel, the message of Christ, the salvation that He brings both spiritual and in the future millennial and in the end eternal.

We don't have a social gospel, folks. We don't have a social gospel. There's nothing about our gospel that is designed to relieve society's inequities. Nothing about our gospel that is designed to gain us political ground. There's nothing about our gospel that's supposed to have any effect on people's psychological well being. We have one simple message and faithful ministry always articulates that saving message of the gospel alone.

There's one other feature. We have five minutes or so to look at it, and that's all right. Sanctify of soul, simplicity of subject and Jesus gives us one more thing to model and that is selectivity of successors...selectivity of successors.

Anybody in ministry knows you cannot do it alone. The Lord has power over Satan. The Lord has power over sin. The Lord has power over sinners. He's going to work His plan through sinners by calling them to Himself, transforming them and powering them and using them. That's His plan. Not through angels, through sinners. We see that in verse 16, He was going along by the Sea of Galilee...remember now, He's gone back to Galilee, according to verse 14, walking down the beach one day. He saw Simon and Andrew...the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea for they were fishermen.

Now He already knew them. According to John 1:35 to 42, they came down to the baptism of John, Simon and Andrew. They saw Jesus there. John told them He was the Lamb of God. They spent time with Jesus. They believed in Jesus. They knew He was the Messiah, so they already knew Him. So He tracks back to find them months later.

The Sea of Galilee...the word "sea" is really much too big a word for that place. It's kind of Semitic. It's a lake, 13 miles at its longest point, seven miles at its widest point. The real name of the place was Gennesaret or Chinnereth which is a form of the word that means harp. And the reason they called it harp is it's kind of harp shaped, also called the Sea of Tiberias, or the Lake of Tiberias for the biggest city on the lake which is on the western shore. But it's a harp-shaped lake, 700 feet below sea level.

There Jesus saw Simon and Andrew whom He had met before. Those are very familiar Greek names. The Hebrew form of Simon is Simeon and there's even a use of Hebrew form of Andrew in

the Talmud, so they may have been Jewish names that got sort of Hellenized.

What were they doing? They were casting a net in the sea. Now this is how they used to fish. They still do in some cases now there on the lake, casting, amphiballane(?) to throw around...throw around. They had a circular net, as much as 20 feet in diameter. The perimeter of it had weights in it. They were very good at draping it over their arm in a certain fashion so that it would unfold and with great dexterity after lots of practice, they could spin that thing and it would fly to its extremity and it would land on the water fully unfolded and it would begin to sing on the edges and it would capture the school of fish that they knew were in the middle. And as the weights took it down to the bottom, there was a rope also in the perimeter, the fishermen would dive to the bottom of the water, get the rope, pull the rope tight, drag the fish to the shore. That's what they did.

The Sea of Galilee, by the way, was a really busy fishing place. There were at least 16 harbors on that little lake...16 harbors. Josephus commandeered 230 boats off the lake for a war called The Galilee War in 68 A.D. So there were some formidable fishing going on in that lake. It was a repository of a great amount of fish.

And by the way, fish was the primary meat in the Mediterranean world. There was not any other meat, it wasn't sheep or anything else, it was fish. So there was a huge market for fish and very likely fishermen at this lake sold their fish all over the Mediterranean. So they were exporters of their fish as well. This was a business. These weren't day laborers. These men had a business, they were in the business of fishing. They were prominent men, as were James and John who were in the same business, and they were partners of Peter and Andrew, we learn that later in the gospel accounts.

So they were in a business, prominent enough business so, according to John 18:15, John was well known to the high priests. So I don't know how they had a connection, but I don't want you to think these guys were poor fishermen. They had a very successful business. It may well be that these men spoke Hebrew, Aramaic and even Greek because they had to do business on an international level.

So Jesus comes along to them. They've already declared their interest in Him back with John the Baptist months before. So He said to them, "Follow Me and I'll make you become fishers of men." This is a command, by the way, that's highly unusual. Rabbis didn't do this, we have no record in all Jewish writings of a rabbi commanding people to follow him. Like the prophets, they told people to follow God, obey God, follow the Law, but there's no record they told their hearers to follow them. Some did, but Jesus does something that's absolutely unique. He called people to follow Him. He called them in an extreme way. He basically called them to abandon absolutely everything. In fact, this is what He said, as you'll see in Mark 8:34 and following, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, follow Me." It's the end of your life, drop everything, follow Me, I'll make you fishers of men.

They would understand that analogy, wouldn't they? There was one use of that in the Old Testament, Jeremiah 16:16, fishing for men, but it was with a view to judgment. This is with a view to salvation.

What is He saying to them? "Drop your family business. Drop your life the way it is. Join Me, let Me train you to be a preacher of the gospel, a herald of the Kingdom." Here Jesus established the means by which the Kingdom will advance. He will use transformed sinners that He sovereignly identifies and sovereignly calls. This is dramatic authority, folks, solely belonging to Jesus in which He demands everything.

What is even more remarkable, verse 18, "Immediately they left their nets and followed Him." Wow! These guys are not pushovers. Would you call Peter a pushover? I don't think so. Did Peter have a mind of his own? I think so. They dropped everything.

What was going on here? A sovereign call and a sovereign enabling, I think this is where the power of God came upon these men and sovereignly they were moved to follow Him. And now Jesus has His first two, Simon and Andrew...or Peter and Andrew.

Going on a little further in verse 19, "He saw James, the son of Zebedee, John, his brother who were also in the boat mending their nets." These guys aren't pushovers either. Do you remember what their nickname was? Sons of thunder. James is the Greek form of Jacob. John is the Greek form of Johannen Zebedee of Zebediah, the Hebrew of that. Zebedee was married to Salome who may well have been a sister to Mary, the mother of Jesus. James and John were in partnership with their dad with Simon and Andrew, according to Luke 5:10. So they were in the same business. And they were doing what you did if you didn't fish, you mended the nets so you could go fish again, cause they were mending the nets. Immediately He called them. "They left their father, Zebedee, in the boat with the hired servant and went away to follow Him."

Can you imagine that? I think the father could be a little upset at that, just jumped out of the boat, "We're out of hee, Dad, and we won't be back." Amazing obedience, amazing, startling. Go over to chapter 2 verse 14, "As Jesus passed by He saw Levi, the son of Alphaeus otherwise known as Matthew sitting in the tax booth and He said to him, 'Follow Me,' and he got up and followed Him." And that's the way it was with all of them. Amazing, sudden, drop everything, instantaneous obedience. Really shocking. And, of course, behind this is the words of Jesus in John 15:16, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and then called you and then empowered you to follow Me." And by the time you get to chapter 3 verse 13 and following, you get all twelve of them in place.

The salient implication here is really obvious, isn't it? He had power over Satan, He had power over sin, and He had power over sinners to call them to Himself. And what we learn about ministry is that what matters is sanctity of soul, simplicity of subject and selectivity of successors. The Lord chose

men to be His companions, we need to do the same.

I will tell you this, folks. Nothing has been more important in my entire life of ministry than surrounding myself with the right men. That's how the Kingdom advances. And I've always tried to work on the principle of 2 Timothy 2, 2 Timothy 2, Paul says, "The things you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

Paul says, "I had the truth, I gave it to you, Timothy. You give it to faithful men who are able to teach others also." Paul to Timothy to faithful men, to others also. But the key is this, entrust these things to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. So you're looking for the faithful and the able. The ministry advances through the faithful and the able. Faithful speaks of their character, and able speaks of their giftedness. The Kingdom advances when we are both faithful and able to proclaim the truths.

Here's the model for ministry...sanctified heart, overcoming sin and temptation, commitment to the singularity of the glorious message of the gospel that has come to us from God through the pages of Scripture concerning Christ, and selectivity of successors, choosing carefully who you surround yourself with so that you can multiply and extend your ministry on and on. That's how our Lord did it. At the same time, demonstrated His power over Satan, sin, and His power even to sovereignly call and transform sinners. He is the King and the King has given us a strategy for following Him.

Father, thank You for Your Word to us this morning. We covered a lot, thought about a lot of things. O Lord, we're so grateful for the tremendous rich insights that Scripture gives to us, can be so practically applied in our own lives. Thank You for the wonder of the message of Mark, its beauty, its simplicity. Give us joy as we continue to pursue its truths, we pray in the name of Christ. Amen.

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