

## **Building The Kingdom of God**

### **Mark 1:14-20**

**Introduction:** 1) What does it take to build a great organization? Create a powerful movement?

What does it take to be successful in attracting followers, building devotion and inspiring life-long commitment?

2) I believe for any great movement 3 things are absolutely essential: 1) A great leader, 2) A compelling vision and 3) a few good men who can provide the necessary foundation upon which to build, grow and expand!

3) In this text we see God bringing all 3 of these essential elements together for the building of His kingdom.

1) A great leader: Jesus! The Christ! The Son of God!

2) A compelling vision: I will make you to become fisher of men! You will play a part in building my kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

3) A few good men to lay the foundation: Simon (Peter) and Andrew (v.16); James and John (v.19).

4) In this text each of these essential components is addressed and developed as God builds His kingdom!

#### **I. We must proclaim the right message**

**1:14-15**

- Jesus calls His followers to become fishers of men. This means whereby that is accomplished is not with bait, hooks or nets. It is with a powerful, confrontational and compelling message!
- Jesus delayed His preaching ministry in Galilee (note a prior Judean time in John 1:19-4:45) until John the baptizer was imprisoned. There is continuity in their ministries but

not much overlap if any. Interestingly, the word “arrested” means “handed over” or “delivered up!” The same word is used 8 times in chapters 14-15 of Jesus’ arrest. James Edwards says, “The Baptizer is the forerunner of Jesus not only in message but also in his fate, which includes suffering and dying.” (p. 45).

- Vs. 14-15 summarize well the preaching ministry of Jesus. Verse 14, interestingly, calls it the “gospel of God.” This is popular in Paul’s letters but appears only here in Mark. It refers to the good news from God now revealed in His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus will proclaim the gospel and He is the gospel! Further, this gospel is crucial to the coming of something called “the kingdom of God.”
- God had only one Son and He made Him a missionary. He had only one Son and He made Him a preacher.
- The message of Jesus is laid out in v. 15 and it breaks down into 4 components:
  - 1) The time is fulfilled
  - 2) The kingdom of God is at hand
  - 3) Repent
  - 4) Believe in the gospel
- The time is fulfilled. The one John said would come (1:7) has appeared! “Time” means a decisive and critical moment in history. A.T. Robertson refers to what begins here as “the Great Galilean Ministry.” It will last for 1 ½ years. Jesus returned to Galilee (away from unbelieving Jerusalem) and the inauguration of a very public preaching ministry in northern Israel is the occasion for a formal announcement, a 1<sup>st</sup> century “press release” if you like.

- The Kingdom of God is at hand. This phrase has provided a lot of discussion and disagreement. I find the comments of Mark Strauss very helpful in his article “The Kingdom of God: Future Hope or Present Reality?” “Jesus’ preaching that the kingdom of God was “near” or “at hand” has provoked much debate concerning the nature of the kingdom. Did Jesus preach that the kingdom was something that would arrive in the future in a dramatic and cataclysmic fashion, or was it a present reality for those who would accept it? Drawing from the work of Johannes Weiss, Albert Schweitzer claimed that Jesus drew his expectations from the Jewish apocalypticism of his day, which viewed God’s kingdom as his dramatic intervention in the future to deliver his people, judge the wicked, and establish his kingdom on earth. Schweitzer called this position “consistent eschatology,” since it was consistent with the apocalyptic expectations of Jesus’ day. [Unfortunately Jesus was wrong and was nailed to a cross for His mistake!]

Against this view, British New Testament scholar C.H. Dodd argued that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom as wholly present. Through Jesus’ person and work, God’s eternal reign had already begun. The hope of the Old Testament prophets has been realized in history. Dodd called his system “realized eschatology” because, in his view, the kingdom has already been realized in the present. [This understanding of the kingdom is personal, subjective and inward in focus. A future cosmic kingdom is not in view.]

The problem with both of these views is that they ignore much contrary evidence. Jesus taught both present and future dimensions of the kingdom. The best interpretation of the data is that the kingdom has been inaugurated through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection but awaits consummation in the future. Most contemporary scholars have

therefore followed the lead of writers like J. Jeremias, W.G. Kümmel, G.E. Ladd, G.R. Beasley-Murray, and D.C. Allison, who recognize that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom as both present and future, as “already” but also “not yet.” (*Four Portraits of Jesus*, 440). With the appearance of the Messiah-King the “kingdom of God” has drawn near. Mark will utilize this term 14 times in his gospel. In the person of Jesus Christ, men are confronted “head on” with the kingdom, the rule and reign of God. What should be their response? What should be our response?

- Repent – “to change one’s mind leading to a change in behavior.” It is both a rational decision and willful act. It involves, in this context, a turning from sin and a turn to the Savior. It is a call that we find in the preaching of John the Baptist, Jesus and Peter (Acts 2). It is at the heart and soul of our response to the gospel and the coming of the King.
- Believe the gospel – If repentance notes what we turn from, “believe” highlights what (Who!) we turn to. Both repent and believe are present imperatives. We, having come face to face with the King, are commanded to live in a state of repentance and trust. This call is not to a momentary, one time decision that has little if any lasting effect. This is a life altering change, a radical transformation of our life orientation! A King has arrived who rightly demands our fellowship and radical obedience.

## II. We must find the right men

1:16-20

- A great movement must have the right message. It must also have the right men to get that message out. They must also embody that message if it is to have lasting impact.
- Based upon John 1:35-49 Jesus had already met these 2 sets of brothers, Simon (Peter) and Andrew (v. 16), as well as James and John (v. 19). All 4 were fishermen who

probably did well in this particular vocation. Jesus capitalizes on this occasion to call them to a new vocation and a new intimacy with Himself.

- Verse 17 is crisp and clear: “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” This is a call to discipleship and a unique one at that. In the rabbinic schools of the day the aspiring student sought out the respected rabbi. Further, their allegiance was to the Law, the Torah, not the teacher. With Jesus it is different! Jesus seeks them and their allegiance will be to Him.
- Jesus looks for men and women who will follow Him! Jesus looks for men and women who will learn from Him! Jesus looks for men and women who will deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Him” (8:34).
- As the Messiah-King, the Son of God, He has this authority. He has this right. And note, there is no prerequisite to following Him. This is a “grace call.” Come as you are but come you must and come now. When He calls, immediately, in faith, we are to follow! This is radical to be sure!
- It is wonderful to note he finds them where they are! It is He who comes looking for them. It is the same with us! He came looking for us. We did not go looking for Him. Follow Me, learn from Me, pattern your life after Me and I will make you become fishers of men.
- “Fishers of men” is a phrase with Old Testament roots that is often overlooked. It is more than a “play on words” in light of the 4 men’s vocation. In the Old Testament it is God who is the fisher of men. The texts where the image is used is often foreboding in the context of divine judgment.

- Jeremiah 16:16-18: “Behold, I am sending for my fishers, declares the Lord, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks. For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes. But first I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and have filled my inheritance with their abomination.”
- Ezekiel 29:3-5: “speak and say, Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, ‘My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.’ I will put hooks in your jaws, and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales; and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams, with all the fish of your streams that stick to your scales. And I will cast you out into the wilderness, you and all the fish of your streams; you shall fall on the open field, and not be brought together or gathered. To the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the heavens I give you as food.”
- Amos 4:2: “The Lord God has sworn by his holiness that, behold, the days are coming upon you, when they shall take you away with hooks, even the last of you with fishhooks.”
- William Lane nails it when he writes, “The summons to be fishers of men is a call to the eschatological [end time] task of gathering men in view of the forthcoming judgment of God. It extends the demand for repentance in Jesus’ preaching. Precisely because Jesus has come fishing became necessary.” (p. 68).

- Verse 20 takes note that like Simon and Andrew, James and John left “immediately” to follow Jesus as His disciples. But note further, and don’t miss this, it also says James and John left their father and the hired servants in the boat! This is striking and captures what it truly means to follow Jesus!
- When we are called to follow Jesus, we are called to forsake everyone and everything else. Listen to how Jesus Himself puts it. I would urge us not to rationalize or explain away His words as mere hyperbole!
  - Matthew 10:34-37: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”
  - Mark 3:33-35: “And he answered them, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ and looking about at those who sat around him, he said, ‘here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.’”
  - Luke 14:26: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”
- The call to follow Jesus is clear and it is unconditional! In essence He puts before us a blank contract, says sign at the bottom and I will fill in the details! This is what it means to be the right men and women. But, there is a third essential.

**III. We must follow the right Master****1:17, 20**

- There is only one right Master to follow in life and into eternity. His name is Jesus.
  - Verse 17 Jesus called and they left all to follow Him.
  - Verse 20 Jesus called and they left all to follow Him.
- Already we know the One we are called to follow is:
  - The Christ 1:1
  - The Son of God 1:1
  - The Lord 1:3
  - The Mighty One 1:7
  - The Worthy One 1:7
  - The baptizer with the Holy Spirit 1:8
  - The Spirit Anointed One 1:10
  - The beloved Son 1:11
  - The One who pleases God 1:11
  - The One who brings the kingdom of God 1:15
- Just in the remainder of Mark 1, we will learn we are called to follow in radical discipleship the One who is:
  - The astonishing teacher 1:22
  - The One with authority 1:22
  - The Holy One of God 1:24
  - Able to cast out demons 1:26, 32-34, 39
  - Able to heal the sick 1:31-34
  - Able to cleanse lepers 1:42



- And this is just chapter one! The kingdom of God has come near because the King is here. Everything has changed. Nothing will ever be the same again. The hour of decision is now. What will be our/your response?

### **Conclusion**

1) Jesus calls us to believe the gospel. One way we do this is to continually preach the Gospel, not only to others but, to ourselves. The result will be that you will see yourself as a much bigger sinner than you thought, and you will then see Jesus as a much greater Savior than you ever imagined.

2) How do you preach the gospel to yourself?

- See and own your sin. Examine yourself in the mirror of God's Word – your negative emotions and attitudes, the responses of others toward you. Guard yourself against sin's deceitfulness – the tendency to water down God's standard, compare yourself to others, shift blame, or commit to trying harder.
- See the sin beneath the sin. Push the "Why?" question until you find whatever it is you are looking to, other than Jesus, for meaning and value in life – your "functional messiah."
- Expose the idols of your heart. Idols always disappoint. They are weak. They can't deliver when you succeed; they can only raise the bar. They can't forgive you when you fail; they can only lower the boom. They are harmful. They hurt you spiritually, emotionally, and physically. They hurt others by undermining your ability to love. They are grievous. By going after these idols/other lovers, you are saying to God, "Jesus is not enough. I also need \_\_\_\_\_ in order to be happy."

- Observation: I am a much bigger sinner than I thought. I am a worthy recipient of God's judgment. Trying harder won't cut it. I am helpless and hopeless in myself. BUT there is One who can deliver and rescue and so I flee to Him and Him alone!
  - View repentance as a gift. Pray for the gift of repentance. Do not "try" to stop sinning; ask God to change your heart. You may change for a season by your own will power, but eventually you will become resentful or fall back into worshiping false idols, which are your true functional messiahs.
  - See Jesus as the only true Savior. Jesus lived for you. Think about and give thanks for specific ways He has lived obediently where you have failed. Jesus died for you. Think about Jesus' death on the cross for your specific sins and idolatry. Thank God that your sin has been punished once and for all. God sees you in Jesus. Think about how God sees you clothed with Jesus' perfect righteousness. Thank Him specifically for how He provides for you in Christ – ways your idols promised but could never deliver. Jesus lives in you. Thank God that He does not leave you to live the Christian life on your own, but the Spirit of Christ now dwells in you. Ask Him to live His righteous life through you, specifically in the areas where you have repented and confessed sin.
  - Embrace the gospel as your motivation for living. Embrace and know that the gospel is how you change, it is the gospel that empowers you to serve, and it is through the gospel that you meet God.
- 3) The King has come and He calls all of us to repent and believe the gospel, to walk away from the idols of our life, former ties and allegiances, and to come and follow Him. Leave your nets, leave your occupation, leave your friends; even leave your family and come and follow Him. The demand is great. But then Jesus is a Great King!