

The Directing Hand of God

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Date: 13 May 2018

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[0 : 0 0] The passage we were meant to read in Jeremiah, we were reading in chapter 9, obviously of the judgment of God against the people, his people. But I want to read in chapter 16, Jeremiah 16.

You will have wondered what on earth is the connection in Jeremiah 9. Well, let's turn to Jeremiah 16. And let's just read, page 644, we'll read from verse 14.

Again in the context of judgment. Therefore behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, as the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but as the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.

But God had driven the people in judgment to these other lands, to the north. For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers. Behold, I'm sending for many fishers, declares the Lord, and they shall catch them.

And of course, as we said in context of Jesus telling the disciples, I will make you fishers of men. And when we were reading there in Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 1, we noticed that Jesus is on a mission.

[1 : 2 5] And he's on a mission of war. He's on a mission to defeat Satan and free those for whom Jesus came to save, to deliver from Satan's darkness.

Jesus' mission, of course, was foretold many centuries, many, many centuries before. But now Jesus has come to fulfil the words of Scripture. Jesus has entered the fray.

Jesus has already engaged in that warfare. We noticed that a few weeks ago in the temptations that Jesus faced there in the wilderness. And Jesus will win the victory.

He'll proclaim and does proclaim good news for sinners. He's proclaimed that his kingdom has come. As we said, he's already demonstrated that conflict with Satan, that conflict that's going to unfold in the next three years of his ministry.

His conflict with Satan. His fight against the devil and the forces of evil. And Jesus will resist the devil. He'll not be diverted in his mission to save sinners.

[2 : 3 2] But in that mission, in that mission of Jesus, who's not only, only going to be resisting the devil, he's also going to be proclaiming the good news of salvation found in him alone.

And it's the beginning of that proclamation, and the sharing of that proclamation with his close disciples, that's what we want to look at this evening. And again, you know, as we notice reading these first few verses, these first verses there of the chapter, you notice how economic Mark's use of language is.

We've noticed this already. Because Mark wants to get to the point, and get to the point succinctly, without fuss, without excess of words. Mark's getting to the point so that you and I can get to the point.

So that you and I can marvel at the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and his willingness to do his Father's will in proclamation, in calling, and in changing lives.

The lives of those, the lives of you, who hear the message and receive it with joy, and receive the Lord Jesus as Savior. So, we'll look at this little section, verses 14 to 20.

[3 : 49] We're going to recognize the proclamation of Jesus, to see that proclamation as the very Word of God, that Word that tells of his reign that's been established.

And it's for you and for me to respond to that call, the call that Jesus gave to follow him, and to keep following him, and to rejoice in that life-changing call that transforms the hearts and minds of all who hear the very Word of Jesus, the good news, that he's proclaimed and keeps proclaiming, so that you, so that I might follow him, so that we might know and respond to that life-changing call of Jesus.

So, if we've got our first point, then Jesus proclaims, verse 14 and 15, after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent, and believe the Gospel. I'm going to put this in your notes, but this is for the first time, the very first time in Mark's Gospel, we're hearing the voice of Jesus.

We're hearing him speak. And notice, it's not, you know, some kind of small talk, it's not some kind of long-winded introduction to some great speech. This is a direct proclamation of good news to be heard from Jesus himself.

[5 : 18] As we know, as God's Word tells us, in times past, God spoke through his prophets. The last of these prophets, John the Baptist, John the Herald, who'd announced that Messiah had come, Christ had come.

John the Baptist, John the Messenger, hadn't kept silent and is preparing the way for Jesus' grand arrival, we might say, in the scene of redemption history.

But now John is silent. The days of the prophets have given way to the coming of the great prophet, the Lord Jesus. And now with John in prison, the messenger, who proclaimed Jesus.

Now that John's in prison, Jesus, the arch messenger, he will speak and proclaim that great message to the people in Galilee, those people who'll hear the message, and of course people throughout the world who continue to hear that message, to hear the gospel of God.

And you know, when you see, we see from verse 14, we see how Mark gives us this information, I mean, it really takes our breath away. when, you know, when you just, as it were, digest the power of few words.

[6 : 32] But remember, these few words convey a great message of hope. They convey a message of joy, that message of deliverance. This is, we might say, a simple telling of Jesus proclaiming the gospel of God, that gospel that speaks of a new dawn, of God acting in a new way for the sake of those for whom Jesus left the glorious heaven to come to earth, to save, to deliver, to bring that freedom for the captives, to open the eyes of the blind.

And you know, when we start to explore the truth, finding these few words, you know, surely we should be so overwhelmed at the love of God through the gospel of God.

the gospel, the good news. I mean, literally, we're reading off the good message. And you know, it's interesting, but Mark, more than any other gospel writer, uses that expression, the gospel, the good message, more than any of the other gospel writers.

He's telling of this, we might say, this history making, life changing news that Jesus proclaimed him for himself as the one whose rule has come, whose rule has made it possible for sinners such as ourselves to know salvation.

Yes, we know we're worthy of God's wrath, but saved from that wrath through the coming of the Lord Jesus, through his facing the wrath of God for sinners for whom he came to save.

[8 : 08] It's that same gospel that Jesus proclaimed 2,000 years ago in Galilee. It's still proclaimed. It's still proclaimed by messengers today. Why? Well, because it's the living gospel.

It's the living good news. And because it's the living good news, it's always fresh. It's always relevant. It's always new. It always brings news of new life to all who will hear Jesus' voice and respond to that voice and faith because he's made it possible.

He is the one who's made it possible for you to know the consequences of that good news, that good message through life in him.

Think of news today. Think of news today. You know, surely we want to hear good news, whether it's in relation to family or friends or maybe some kind of interest we have.

last week. I rejoiced. I rejoiced at the news of three American Korean Christians released from North Korean imprisonment. I'm sure you saw that on television.

[9 : 14] It was good news. It was good news to drown out so much bad news that came across our media channels last week. And of course, we should rejoice at that news.

And how much more to rejoice at the good news of the gospel of God that Jesus has come to release us from the imprisonment of sin and Satan.

Because the gospel of God is good news that Jesus himself has brought, that Jesus has proclaimed to us. And it's been given with the most wonderful of information.

The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. Jesus' mission to save fulfilled the promise of a Savior to come.

All the sacrifices that pointed, all the Old Testament sacrifices that pointed to a once for all sacrifice for sin and as you know were pointing forward to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 17] All the words of the prophets about the Messiah to come now fulfilled in the Lord Jesus. Because the waiting was over. The time had arrived. As we were saying this morning that just the right time the kingdom of God was being established through the king who had come to bring in his reign of righteousness.

That kingdom that Jesus had come to establish in order to renew the relationship between God and man. That relationship that had been severed by sin.

As we read there in Genesis 3 when Adam sinned when man sinned. Of course the creation account itself. The creation account of God establishing his rule on earth.

And man disobeying God's rule. Well we praise God that was not the end of the matter. We read in Genesis man had wanted to be king.

He wanted to make himself king. He wanted to usurp God's authority. And because of that sinful desire sin entered the world. Man's self-centered desire for his own authority destroyed the perfection of Eden.

[11 : 31] Sin in all its ugliness disrupted that relationship between God and man. And only another representative man would be able to restore that relationship between God and man.

Only a man who was fully obedient to God's law could take her place and restore that right relationship between man and God. And of course that man was Jesus is Jesus.

In his humanity Jesus took her place. Because he alone could represent us before God. And in his divinity Jesus could represent God to us.

He's worthy of all worship. He's worthy of all obedience as God. In his divinity worthy of all praise. Worthy to forgive us our sins. Worthy of his authority as God.

You know when we think of these great truths remember these are stated and taken into our hearts so that we might believe.

[12 : 34] So that we might believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So that we might turn to him and do as he commands us to do. As he declared there in Galilee repent and believe in the gospel.

In other words on the basis that the kingdom of God has come. The kingdom of God is at hand. On the basis that the gospel of God is proclaimed announcing that message of good news.

Jesus has come. Remember the divine son of God has come to win salvation for you. Remember as we say as fully human to take our place before a holy God and as God to represent God before us and demand that obedience to him.

So it's for you and for me. Well to do something about that wonderful truth surely it's to respond to that command of Jesus to repent and believe.

Repent and believe in the gospel. These are commands. But notice they're commands that emphasize urgency. They emphasize the necessity of your response to the good news.

[13 : 41] Repent. Literally change your mind. turn completely around from an attitude to God that was once hostile to him. At one time it was so much of enmity against him.

Turn it around to an attitude of heart that looks to him and follows him. Commits your life to him. Follows him as your Lord and Savior.

That was the call of the Old Testament prophets. The call that people like Jeremiah to the people to turn from their evil ways and return to God.

And now the greatest of prophets the Lord Jesus is giving that note of urgency. The kingdom is near therefore repent. And that command to repent well that command has still been given.

It's still been given to the one who calls us to turn to him. To turn from our idols. To turn from our self-centeredness. To turn from the kingdom of the world and turn to the kingdom of God and believe by believing in the gospel of God.

[14 : 48] In other words, we're being commanded to come to Jesus by faith. To believe that he and he alone is the one who's made it possible for you to know salvation. Who's made it possible for you to be born again.

Who's made it possible for you to have eternal life. Command us there. Repent and believe. To come to him with that willing heart. To repent of your sins.

To seek the forgiveness of God. And to cry out to him, Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner. And to come crying out in faith. Knowing that he and he alone has made it possible for you.

It's possible for you to believe. And to be strong in him. So that you know that you can remain on that road to heaven. Because Jesus remained on that road to Calvary.

a command to repentance. Not a command to penitence. So many made a mistake so many years ago and many still make that mistake today.

[15 : 49] Because there's all the difference in the world between repentance and penitence. Because Jesus isn't calling us to be right with God through some kind of act of self-denial.

Or some kind of putting things right with God. Some pilgrimage or penance to make yourself right with God. No. He's calling you as you are.

And for you to cry out as we said already as the tax collector cried out, God have mercy on me a sinner. Come to him and faith. You'll know that healing, the healing of God through the finished work of the Lord Jesus.

The work that Jesus began there in Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God. That calling people to repent and believe. God is a call that's not going to be silenced until Jesus returns in all his glory.

It's a call that has to be proclaimed from every pulpit in the land. It's a call that we must continue to proclaim before a world because the world by nature will not repent of sin.

[17 : 00] One time, none of us here, none of us at one time would repent. but in that quickening power of the Holy Spirit, you are gifted that faith to believe.

You are unable to come before God in true repentance of heart. Of course, it's still, you know, the Lord Jesus as Savior, it's still for you to come to him each day and confess your sins before him, to repent of your sins, and to continue to repent, continue to believe, to have faith in the Lord Jesus.

us. It's for you, for me, to work out our salvation day by day with fear and trembling. That you know that the one who calls you to repent and believe the gospel, you know that he's given you no false hope.

You know that your salvation isn't an illusion. You know it's real because he's real. You know it's true because he's true. You know that your salvation is certain because he's gone before.

He's gone before you and he promises you that joy in his presence. Even now as you await that eternal joy in the glory of heaven. So we've seen Jesus proclaiming.

[18 : 15] Well secondly what do we see? We see Jesus calling. And notice how Mark shows us that aspect that Jesus calls.

You know as soon as Jesus has announced that the kingdom of heaven is near, that it's necessary for people to believe and repent. Notice that immediately after these commands Jesus calls.

Jesus calls people to follow him. Jesus calls people to propagate the gospel and share in the telling of the good news. You see that in verse 16. Passing alongside the sea of Galilee he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen.

And Jesus said to them follow me and I will make you become fishers of men. Jump a wee bit to verse 19. And going on a little further he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother who were in their boat mending their nets and immediately he called them.

I remember as a young boy growing up in Perth attending well at that time there was an afternoon Sunday school. I was in choruses at that Sunday school. One of the choruses I remember was the well known one I will make you fishers of men if you follow me.

[19 : 32] And I guess then I don't know how old I was, nine, ten maybe, I'm not quite sure if we fully understood what we were singing. And I wonder even now do we still understand what Jesus was doing and telling these disciples when he called these four fishermen to follow him.

You know especially as we've been before we started preaching especially this context of making them fishers of men. These four fishers I will make you fishers of men.

Now I suppose on one level we could suggest that Jesus was using the context of their fishing and turning that into an activity of catching people for the kingdom.

After all these disciples are going to accompany Jesus as Jesus teaches and heals and brings people into the kingdom by his word. I mean later these same disciples here they're going to be apostles, they're going to go out with the word of Jesus, they're going to continue the mission that Jesus sends them on.

But they might suggest also that the fishing for men has to do with judgment. I mean there are a number of Old Testament passages where references are made to fishing for men.

[20 : 52] in the context of God's judgment. In the passage I ought to read first in Jeremiah 16, Jeremiah 16, 16, we read there of God declaring his judgment against his unfaithful people.

When enemies would invade the land and capture the people, behold I'm sending for many fishers declares the Lord and they shall catch them. There are quite a number of passages I could refer to.

Another one is Amos 4 verse 2, God's word of judgment against unfaithful Israel. 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 fish hooks.

So we might say this, that in the context of Jesus using this fishing analogy, is the call to his chosen disciples to gather people into the kingdom in view of the coming judgment of God.

And that's why there's the urgency of the call, that's why we read immediately he called them. That urgency of the command, yes we might say to repent and believe in the light of that command.

[22 : 02] I mean people are called to share in the gathering of God's church in view of the impending judgment of God. And surely we have to bear that in mind every time God's word is preached.

every time that you share God's word, every time you give a testimony to God's saving grace. I mean whatever aspect of witnessing you're involved in, we've got to remember the context.

The context is there's a judgment to come. So we are to be fishers of men in light of that judgment. So there is that immediacy that's required in the sowing of the seed of God's word.

There's that necessity of being that word-centred church that holds to the truth of God's word that speaks of judgment to come. Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus, unless you're born again you cannot see the kingdom of God.

We're not in the business of some nice kind of feel-good worship service with nice people sitting for an hour in the comfort of a building just to make ourselves feel good.

[23 : 13] No, we have a battle ground to face. We've been given that call of Jesus to warn others of the coming judgment of God against all who resist that grace.

And we know that in God's patience he's given us time to tell the good news, time to catch men for the kingdom. So be fishers of men.

Be fishers with that urgency that comes because we don't know the day nor the hour when Jesus will return as judge. So in that urgency of proclaiming the whole counsel of God, well we know from God's word, we know from our experience that the call of Jesus changes lives.

We see that in verses 18 and 20. The third point where we see Jesus changes, changes lives, verse 18, and immediately they left their nets and followed him. Then go on to verse 20, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with their hired servants and followed him.

Three things to notice here, just from these few words. Firstly, the immediacy of the call, followed by the immediacy of the response of following Jesus.

[24 : 27] Because notice, there was no hesitation in these four fishermen leaving their vacations to follow Jesus. They were going to fish for men.

There was no hesitation in their doing so. You might say, how? How is it? Well, why? Because of the authority of Jesus. Jesus' call is utterly compelling.

That simple call of Jesus, follow me. We see here he's met with this immediate response of obedience. That's the irresistible grace of God.

That grace that calls men and women, boys and girls to himself to follow him. There's no turning back. There's no considering the options. There's that immediate following of Jesus.

But notice secondly, there's a willing following of Jesus. I mean, these four men, they don't respond with a reluctance to follow Jesus.

[25 : 26] We're told that they leave their homes, they leave their livelihood, and they follow Jesus because of the authority of Jesus. Again, I mean, such is the love of Jesus.

Jesus calling people to himself. And the response of gladness. Jesus called you when you received that call, you followed him because God initiated that call.

And the sinner, the sinner to whom God calls to himself, you know that when you receive that call, by faith you received him, you followed him.

and it's for me, for you to respond in the consequence of that call to leave behind all that once claimed our affections. Because what we're seeing here, I believe, is what we might call the radical nature of discipleship.

It's that following Jesus first and foremost. As Jesus declared in Luke's Gospel, Luke 14, 26, if anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

[26 : 36] Jesus telling of that following him with all our heart and strength and mind and soul. So much so that every other attachment in your life, whether it's family or friends or work, everything else looks like hate in comparison.

Now, of course, not active hate, we're not talking about active hate, but that sense of loving less. Why? Because Jesus must have first place in my life, in your life.

That means that we don't follow Jesus conditionally. We don't say, oh, well, I'll follow you Jesus if. Well, the four disciples here, we don't read of them saying, we'll follow you Jesus if.

No, they follow Jesus immediately. They follow him without conditions. It's for you, for me, to follow him wholly, or wholly, completely, fully, intensely with all that we are.

But notice thirdly, this whole matter of following Jesus. As we saw in verse 17, Jesus, come on, follow me. Verse 18, and they followed him.

[27 : 47] Again, verse 20, they followed him. Perhaps we don't use this expression often enough when we think of discipleship, this idea of following Jesus. following Jesus where Jesus leads you.

That keeping close to Jesus, knowing where he is leading you to. That being with him as he's with you. So following him because you united to him and with him.

It's that attitude of heart that Andy was preaching from these times when we're looking at Ruth. Remember when Ruth declared of her following her mother-in-law Naomi, for where you go, I will go, where you lodge, I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. So we can say, Lord Jesus, Jesus where you go, I will go. Lord, I'll follow you wherever you send me, wherever you're leading me.

I mean, is that your testimony of discipleship? Or is it still within your heart to have that selfish desire to do it my way? To go my way?

[28 : 55] To go my own way, and do my own thing, and follow my own heart, rather than follow the one who promises never to leave you, and never to forsake you. Well, for the disciples, these disciples that we've read of here, they would follow Jesus, where Jesus would lead them.

And that three-year ministry, public ministry of Jesus, yes, and after his ascension, they'd follow Jesus in that path that Jesus sent them on to be his witnesses.

Of course, that following Jesus changed their lives. That following Jesus will change your life and continue to change your life. Because you're not your own.

I'm not my own. You were bought with a price. You were bought even with the cost of the life of the Lord Jesus and his death for you, so follow him. I know that change that Jesus makes in your life.

That change that's for the eternal good of your soul and for the glory of his name. Because it's an eternal change. It's a change that only happens when grace touches you and grace changes you.

[30 : 05] When the grace of the Lord Jesus, the saving grace of God, transforms your heart, that grace that sends you in a new direction. When in your repentance and faith, you follow the Lord Jesus.

Do you know that change in your life? Are you striving each day to be more like Jesus? Or are you still hardened in your heart? Are you still rejecting his call to follow him?

Well, I pray that you will follow Jesus. I know that joy of that following Jesus and his leading you to, in his love, that promise, that love that promises his eternal presence with you, as you journey with him, with him who's called you from darkness into his marvelous light.

Amen. Let us pray. Our God, our Savior, we give you thanks that the Lord Jesus proclaimed and continues to proclaim the gospel, even the very gospel of God.

that proclamation that calls sinners to you, that proclamation that when received by faith with joy, will change the lives of all who hear the word and obey it.

[31 : 26] And so, Lord, we give thanks for those who have received that word and responded in faith, by faith, through the gift of faith, given in grace.

we thank you, Lord, for these words. And we pray, Lord, that we will not be hearers only, but not doers also. Truly, Lord, may we have heard and do as your word commands.

Hear us, Lord, as we then commit ourselves in worship before you now, even through the singing of the psalm of praise you have given us to sing. And help us, Lord, to enjoy one another's fellowship, even through the remainder of this day.

We pray these things. In Jesus' name, Amen.