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[0 : 00] Well, good morning again, church. Would you turn with me to Mark chapter 1, verses 1, verses 14 through 20. Mark chapter 1, verses 14 through 20.

That's page 785 in the Pew Bible. It'll be on the screens as I read it in just a second. But let me encourage you to actually have it open throughout our time of considering this passage together. Let me read, and then I'll pray for us. Mark 1, 14 through 20. Now, after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, the time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. 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. And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James, the son of Zebedee, and John, his brother, who were in their boat mending their nets.

[1 : 09] And immediately he called them. And they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. All right, let's pray together.

Father in heaven, help us now as we come to this word to do what we just sung, to turn our eyes upon Jesus and to see in him our Savior ever true, our good and rightful king.

We ask all this in his name and by the power of your Holy Spirit, Father. Amen. Well, perhaps you can think of a time when you were waiting for something big to come.

I have to confess, every time I place an Amazon order, truthfully, whether it's small or big, I get a little excited waiting for that package to show up on my door, right?

But that's nothing compared to waiting for, say, something bigger like your birthday to come, or if you're expecting, you're waiting for the day when your child will come, or perhaps you're waiting for a loved one to come home from a long trip, or perhaps waiting for news about some big event, waiting for something big to come.

[2 : 26] Maybe in your life right now you're kind of waiting for something big, something bigger than an Amazon package anyway. I think at the deepest level, I think at the deepest level, we're kind of all waiting for something big, aren't we?

I mean, if we pause and we're just quiet for a moment, we're waiting for the day when finally, maybe, possibly, hopefully, something will change.

In this broken world, we all catch ourselves sometimes waiting and hoping for something big. When will the day come?

When will things finally get put right? Not just the little things, but like the whole thing, right?

When will the world finally get put right? And I wonder if those little kind of everyday expectations that we have are like little glimmers or little echoes of that deeper human longing.

[3 : 34] You know, at a silly level, I'm waiting for my Amazon package to come because I'm out of my favorite pens, and once that package gets here, finally, my writing needs will be put right at long last.

You're waiting for your promotion at work because then maybe your financial needs can get put right. You're waiting for your baby to come because then maybe your desire for a family, for a home, for a deep love can get put right.

But maybe, perhaps, something even bigger can come that will put everything right. And you know, if you've ever felt that longing, the good news is you're in good company.

One of the great themes or threads or desires that kind of drives the whole Bible is exactly that. It's the hope that the world could be put right again.

If you start reading the Old Testament, you'll see, well, you'll see that things go wrong pretty quickly. But then there's a promise. A promise that one day the wrong will be undone, everything sad will come untrue, and at last sickness, sorrow, and death will be no more.

[4 : 52] But keep reading the Old Testament, and you'll see that there's a growing wisdom that develops. A growing wisdom that the human problem, the world's problem, is so intractable and so great and so deep that humans can't solve it.

As the last chapters of the Old Testament come to a close, we see that if the world is going to be put right, then God must be the one to do it. And as the ages kind of roll on after the close of the Old Testament, the Jewish people begin talking about this hope, this longing in terms of God's kingdom. That is when God, the Lord, the world's true king, comes to reign and comes to put the world right again.

If you ask many Jews in the first century, what is it that's going to heal the world? What's going to take this broken world full of injustice and wrong and suffering and death, what's going to heal it once and for all?

The answer would have been God's kingdom. Now listen again to verses 14 through 15 of Mark 1. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God and saying, the time's fulfilled.

[6 : 18] The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel. Jesus' message was that the reign of God, the kingdom of God, the hope of the world, the healing of the world, the putting right of all things had arrived.

The time is fulfilled, the wait is over, and the healing has begun. It's at hand. That is, it's pressing down right now in this moment.

And Jesus says, that's good news. And it's not just the good news, the gospel of Rome or of Caesar. It's not the good news of any human empire or any human endeavor or human striving, but it's the gospel, the good news of God.

God's tremendous, history-changing good news. God's kingdom is at hand. God's kingdom is at hand. So this passage from Mark that we just read helps us to understand then two very important things, and we're going to look at them both together.

First, in verses 14 through 15, Mark helps us to see Jesus' message. And then in verses 16 through 20, we see Jesus' call.

[7 : 36] That is, how should we respond to that message? There's a lot of misunderstanding about both of those things, but Mark's going to help us to get it right. What is Jesus' message, and what is Jesus' call?

How should we respond to that message? So when we consider first Jesus' message in verses 14 through 15, we see that ultimately the message of Jesus maybe isn't what we expect.

After all, it's common to think of Jesus as just one of the great religious leaders, right, who came to start another religious movement. And what do great religious leaders do? Well, they come and they give new teaching, and they give new instructions to follow, right?

The Buddha came and he taught the four truths, and Muhammad brought the five pillars, and Jesus, well, well, actually, Jesus is quite different. He breaks the mold.

Because his message isn't primarily a new code of ethics. Of course, Jesus did teach us how to live. But the heart of his message, the real heart of Jesus' message wasn't something that you and I should be doing, but something that God was doing.

[8 : 38] God's kingdom had arrived. The time was up. And that's why Jesus uses the word gospel. Of course, that's a pretty kind of religious-y sounding word today, isn't it?

Gospel. But it wasn't in the first century. In Jesus' day, the word gospel, or good news, referred to what messengers proclaimed when great battles had been won, or when emperors had been born, or when kingdoms rose and kingdoms fell.

A gospel in the first century wasn't a religious word. It was a political word. It was a social word. It was a word that you would read on the front page of the New York Times, not in your church bulletin. It was news.

So it's quite significant that Jesus' message is first and foremost not a dogma or an ethic, but a gospel, a message of something that is being done.

Something is happening. God is doing something. And God is doing something good. He's come at last to make things right. The healing has begun.

[9 : 50] But you see, Jesus' message wasn't just that God's kingdom had arrived, but that God's kingdom had arrived in him.

Now, we'll take the rest of Mark's gospel for this reality to unfold, but we do see it here. What is it that starts the inbreaking of God's reign? It's Jesus when he steps forward and says, the time is fulfilled.

His arrival, his proclamation is the beginning of God's kingdom. And so what Mark wants us to see, even at this earliest point in his gospel, isn't just that God's kingdom is at hand, but that God's kingdom is at hand in Jesus.

The healing of the world comes through him. That is a bit challenging for us today, isn't it? We can think of all sorts of things we think that need to happen in order for the world to be healed, in order for things to be put right.

But if at the center of that, hope and longing and dream and plan is not the Lord Jesus, then we've departed from God's own plan and way of bringing his kingdom and healing the world.

[11 : 21] So, you know, if you would have asked a typical Jewish person in the first century, as I said, what's going to heal the world, they would have said God's kingdom. But if you would have asked a Christian, whether Jew or Gentile, they would have said the same thing with this twist.

God's kingdom, and it's come in Jesus. God has begun to reclaim his fallen world, to heal what's broken, and he's doing it through his eternal son, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

And isn't that good news? Why? Well, think with me for a second. Imagine God, who he's revealed himself to be, holy, just, good, sovereign, mighty, beautiful beyond measure.

Imagine God, upon whom we all depend for every second, coming to put things right, taking all the wrong and injustice and evil in the world and putting it away once and for all.

That's a wonderful hope, isn't it? Until you stop to think, what about my own wrongs and my own injustices?

[12 : 37] What about my own heart? That yes, more often than I care to admit, is so self-centered and at times even evil. And then you might start to think, God's kingdom, yes, it might be good news for the world, but is it good news for me, a sinner?

When God's kingdom comes, how could there possibly be a place for me? But consider Jesus. Jesus arrives in Galilee.

Now, that's a pretty curious place to begin the kingdom, to begin the reign of God, Galilee. After all, think about it. In the first century, Rome was the center of the Gentile world in the first century.

Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish world. If you were going to start the in-breaking reign of God and fix things, you think you would start there, right? No. Jesus begins in Galilee.

He begins in the margins. Galilee is just this ordinary place. But there, that's where Jesus begins.

[13 : 51] Not among the political elite, not among the religious or the moral elite, Galilee. But Jesus doesn't just begin His ministry on the margins.

He ends it there as well. Where does the gospel of Mark lead? Do we see Jesus in a liberating victory march to Rome to overthrow oppression and injustice?

Do we see a sort of triumphant march to Jerusalem, toppling all the sort of corrupt religiosity happening in the capital? No. Jesus' ministry comes to its climax on a hill outside of Jerusalem, surrounded by criminals, hung up to die on a Roman cross.

And we ask, is this how God's kingdom comes? Through the tragic execution of a young Jewish man named Jesus?

Is that God's kingdom? But don't you see? Jesus wasn't just any young Jewish man.

[15 : 07] He was the king of God's kingdom. And the king knew that if God's kingdom was going to be good news for you and me, for sinners, then he would have to step, not just into the margins of our ordinary life, but he'd have to go even further and step down into the sin and self-centeredness that broke the world in the first place.

He would have to take your place at the judgment so you could join his place in the kingdom. That's what the king does for you and me.

And that's why it's such good news that God's kingdom has come in Jesus. So do you believe that?

Do you believe that God's kingdom has arrived in Jesus? that here lies the secret, the answer to the healing of the world, the crucified rabbi from Galilee, the risen and reigning Lord Jesus?

That is the very proclamation of Christianity from beginning to end. And if so, if you do believe that, how should you respond?

[16:26] Well, that brings us to the rest of our passage. In verses 16 through 20, what we see is Jesus' call. And these verses give us a vivid picture of what the end of verse 15 means.

Jesus says in verse 15, right, repent and believe the gospel. Well, what does that mean? Well, we see it here in verses 16 through 20. When Jesus comes to Simon, whom Jesus will give the new name Peter a little later, when he comes to Simon and Andrew and James and John, he says, follow me.

And what do they do? They leave their nets and they leave their family and they follow him. Now, let me point out three things about this call.

First, Jesus says, follow me, right? He is the object of the call. Without qualification, without hesitation, Jesus says, follow me.

And that was very radical in the first century. It wasn't something that other teachers or rabbis would do. You know, notice he doesn't say like all the Old Testament prophets, follow Torah, follow the law of Moses.

[17:33] And he doesn't say like everyone says today, follow your heart. You know, a dream is a wish the heart makes. Find it and follow it. Keep navel gazing until you discover your true self, right?

No. Jesus says, follow me. If you want to be part of God's kingdom, you must follow me.

And that means you must leave something behind. Your nets and your family. If you want to understand the real meaning of Jesus' call to repent, repent, here it is.

Repentance, you see. Again, it's not this sort of narrow religious word. We hear the word repent and we think it means sort of like be sorry for breaking the rules. Well, it is that, but it's deeper than that. In reality, repentance is a whole life shift of allegiance. The direction of your life changes. What defines your life right now?

[18:39] Your vocation? Your work? Your family? Your people? Your tribe? I think for most of us, it's usually one or the other of those two things, isn't it?

It's either my work that defines me or it's my people that define me, right? You meet someone new and eventually they're going to ask you, so what do you do? Right?

And then you tell them your job or where are you from or who are you a part? What, you know, what's your people, right? I'm a Mets fan or whatever, you know. Jesus says, you have to leave them both and follow me.

I'm what defines you now, Jesus says. Now, you might be thinking that was easy for a handful of poor fishermen on the shores of Galilee. What did they have to lose, right?

But, you know, the reality is Simon and Andrew and James and John, you know, they weren't sort of poor, desperate fishermen with nothing to lose. I think that's a pretty, pretty big historical misconception we have about these first disciples.

[19:50] You know, when we look at the history, we see that the fishing industry around the Sea of Galilee was actually this sort of thriving business in the first century. And it wasn't just sort of a local trade.

You know, you remember, in the Greco-Roman world, fish was like the staple food, right? Everyone ate fish all the time. It's how they got their protein. And fish from the Sea of Galilee were exported and prized and valued as far south as Alexandria and Egypt and as far north as Antioch and Syria, which were two of the biggest cities in the Roman Empire.

So the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were actually competing in an international Mediterranean market and by all accounts, they were pretty successful at it. I mean, consider Zebedee right here, the father of James and John.

He has hired servants working for him. These aren't poor fishermen living hand to mouth. So what were Andrew and Simon and James and John walking away from?

They were walking away from a thriving family business in a culture where family meant everything. In other words, they had everything to lose.

[21:06] So why did they do it? What would make them drop everything and follow Jesus? Well, we know from John's Gospel that they had met Jesus and even spent some time with him before this encounter in Galilee.

So Jesus wasn't a totally unknown quantity to them. But still, this moment right here on the shores of Galilee while they're at their boats and with their family and working on their nets, this is the decisive moment.

Why did they go? What was it about Jesus that they were willing to leave everything and follow him? Well, I think that question is exactly the question that Mark wants his readers to be asking. What would make four ordinary, prosperous men drop everything to follow this Jesus? Aren't you curious?

Don't you want to see what they saw? And Mark's Gospel takes us on a journey where we can do just that, to see in Jesus what they saw.

[22 : 20] So if you're wondering what would make people leave their job or leave their family and follow Jesus, you need to stay tuned and keep reading.

But I like what Jerome, the church father, has to say about this passage writing in the fourth or fifth century, I think it is. He writes, there must have been something divinely compelling in the Savior's guileless countenance.

There must have been something divinely compelling in the Savior's guileless countenance that persons merely upon seeing him could trust.

Just one real look at Jesus is what it takes to trust him. Now, will you literally have to quit your job and abandon your family to follow Jesus?

Some of you might be thinking, I kind of don't like my job and my family annoys me. I would love to quit everything and follow Jesus. Sign me up! Right? Right? Well, no.

[23 : 32] You know, more often than not in the Gospels, Jesus tells people who trust in him to go home and tell your family and your hometown how much I've done for you. The point here is that work and family, vocation and tribe, however you define it, they don't have our ultimate allegiance anymore.

They aren't our identity anymore. And that means if we have to quit our jobs to follow Jesus, we would. And if we have to leave our social tribe or our social network, we will.

He gets the priority over everything else. That's real repentance. And that's what it means to follow Jesus and enter God's kingdom.

But notice the second thing about this call. Notice that Jesus says, follow me and I will make you something. I will make you become fishers of men, he says.

Now of course Jesus is using an obvious wordplay on their profession but there's also a subtle allusion here to the Old Testament. Earlier in the service we read from the prophet Jeremiah where Jeremiah looks ahead to when God is going to judge and save his people and even extend his kingdom to the Gentiles.

[24 : 47] And what does Jeremiah say? He says, the Lord through Jeremiah says, I'm going to send out fishers and I'm going to send out hunters and I'm going to gather them all in. So you see, the call to follow Jesus isn't a call to mere observation.

Following Jesus isn't about becoming a mere spectator to the work of God's kingdom. It's about becoming a participant. With this new identity comes a new mission, a new purpose, a new reason to get up in the morning.

Peter and Andrew and James and John they were presumably really good at catching fish. That's what got them up every morning probably a lot earlier than you and I get up in the morning, right? But now it wasn't going to be about bringing fish from water to land.

Now it was going to be about seeing people brought from death to life. Seeing men and women lost under the curse of the fall come to know that God's kingdom had come in Jesus and that forgiveness and new life could be found in Him.

You see, every follower of Jesus is also a minister of Jesus. God has good works prepared for you to do. God wants you to not just enjoy His forgiveness and grace but to join the mission of advancing His kingdom.

[26 : 24] A Christian who doesn't serve and minister is sort of like a kite that never flies, right? What a shame to be stuck on the ground when you could be feeling the wind carrying you up into the sky and clouds.

That's where God is calling you. God is calling you. The call of Jesus is the call to join the work. Of course, Peter and Andrew and James and John, they probably didn't understand all this at first, right?

And they certainly were not ready for it. Ah, but notice carefully what Jesus says. He says, I will make you become fishers of men.

Now, I have to confess, as I was studying for the preaching this week and I read that verse, I thought, that is a clumsy translation, right? Certainly, we could have cleaned that up a little bit and made that a little smoother, but actually, as I got into it, it's a really good translation of that verse, even though it sounds a little strange.

I will make you become fishers of men. In other words, Jesus is promising here that along the way of following Him, He will make them what they need to be.

[27 : 39] He will make them become what they need to be in order to do the work He's called them to do. The call of Jesus is a call to follow and become.

So, if you're thinking that you're not ready to follow Jesus, you're not ready to follow Him and join the mission, if you're thinking you're not ready, well, you're right.

no one is ever ready to follow Jesus. That's why He says, follow me and I will make you become. So, trust Him.

Put your life in His hands and He will make you become. To be sure, He will use all sorts of means to get you there. He'll use the means of worship and community and His Word and He'll use the means of His Spirit and prayer and He'll even use the means of suffering and trials.

But the promise stands, I'll make you become. So, you don't need to clean up your act or get your life together before you follow Jesus.

[28 : 52] It's His job to do the cleaning and the changing. What you need to do is let down your nets and follow Him. But lastly, notice one more thing about this call, this call to enter God's kingdom and this call to follow King Jesus.

It's also a call to a fellowship. Jesus knows us and calls us individually by name. Isn't that wonderful? Simon, Andrew, James, John, we're known and we're called by name but we join something bigger than ourselves.

Following Jesus means following Him alongside others. There's no such thing as a lone ranger Christian. We have to do this together. And when we do it together, following Jesus as our King, then it's like the mustard seed that Jesus mentions in Mark chapter 4.

Jesus said, with what can we compare the kingdom of God or what parable shall we use for it? it's like a grain of mustard seed which when sown in the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on earth.

Yet when it's sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

[30 : 20] The kingdom starts small and then it grows and then it becomes a place of shelter and shade, a place of healing and a place of home.

So according to Mark's gospel, according to Jesus, what we're waiting for is here. It's here in Jesus, the crucified and risen Lord.

And of course, it's here oftentimes in a seed. Right? God's kingdom in Jesus one day will come in fullness and then the glory of God will cover the earth like the waters cover the sea and that day is still in the future but already that kingdom has begun.

The fall is starting to set in. Winter is passing and the signs of spring are starting to spring up so come and follow him. Mark says, let down your nets and follow him.

He's not looking for polish and prestige. He's not looking for perfect people because there are none he's calling you right where you are right there in the ordinary.

[31 : 27] Come and follow me. Come enter God's kingdom. Come join God's reign and let the healing begin. Let's pray together.

Our Lord Jesus as we pause and take a moment before you we ask that you would soften our hearts to you and to your call. God some of us here have heeded this call many years ago and we continue to heed it and we thank you that that is not because of our own wisdom or grace or strength but because of your grace and Holy Spirit.

Lord renew in us that sense to let down our nets and to even leave our family and follow you. Father for those who are feeling the tug of this call but are perhaps unsure would you help them to see in the face of Jesus one who can be trusted and who has gone to the very uttermost to love them and bring them home.

O Lord we pray that your kingdom would come in and through our church for Jesus' sake Father. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[32 : 56] Amen. Amen.