

## The Gospel According to Jesus

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." <sup>16</sup> And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> They immediately left their nets and followed Him. <sup>19</sup> When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. <sup>20</sup> And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.

Newspaper editors pride themselves on accuracy. So in the late 1800s, one newspaper editor must have just about fallen off his chair when he saw that two stories had been jumbled into one by his type setters. The one story was about a new patented pig-killing and sausage-making machine, and the other was about a clergyman, Rev. Dr. Mudge who had been presented with a gold cane. This was how the now jumbled story read in the already distributed newspaper:

"Several of the Rev. Dr. Mudge's friends called upon him yesterday, and after a conversation the unsuspecting pig was seized by the hind leg, and slid along a beam until he reached the hot-water tank.....Thereupon he came forward and said that there were times when the feelings overpowered one, and for that reason he would not attempt to do more than thank those around him for the manner in which such a huge animal was cut into fragments was simply astonishing. The doctor concluded his remarks, when the machine seized him and in less time than it takes to write it the pig was cut into fragments and worked up into delicious sausage. The occasion will be long remembered by the doctor's friends as one of the most delightful of their lives. The best pieces can be procured for ten pence a pound, and we are sure that those who have sat so long under his ministry will rejoice that he has been treated so handsomely."

Sadly, there are times when the Christian message appears about as jumbled and garbled as that newspaper article. Instead of the clarity and accuracy we need, all kinds of religious clichés, platitudes and cultural niceties are attached to some biblical verses, and people are told that this is the gospel.

If there is any areas in which we need clarity and accuracy, it is the gospel. What is the good news that Jesus and His disciples preached? What is the Christian message which you are supposed to hear in church each Sunday?

Ask the average Christian what the gospel is, and you will hear many different messages. Some think it is money to the poor and food to the hungry. Some think it is political revolution. Some think it is social renovation. Some think it is some kind of emotional therapy to heal your damaged emotions and take away your misplaced shame. Some think it is about realising your inner godhood. And all these messages get combined and conflated and we end up with a very garbled message of the Christian message.

Fortunately, Jesus Himself made it crystal clear. The source of the Christian message was not vague or confusing in His own words. When Jesus began His public ministry, He began it with some unmistakable calls that sum up the Christian life. These two calls really serve to summarise much of what the Christian message is, and what Jesus demands from the world. In this passage we'll see two of these calls that Jesus made.

## I. The Call to Salvation

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

There is a gap of time between verses 13 and 14. Mark has abbreviated things, as he often does. Right after Jesus' baptism and temptation, Jesus returned to the area John was working in, and John continued to testify of him. Jesus met Andrew, Simon, Nathaniel, Philip and possibly James and John, and they began following him. He travelled up to a wedding in Cana, and then up to Capernaum. He returned to Jerusalem, cleansed the temple, met Nicodemus by night, and was with John the Baptist again. At this point, John was arrested.

Jesus knew that opposition was rising, so he headed north to Galilee. In between Galilee and Judea is Samaria, and it was then that he met the Samaritan woman by the well. All of this takes a few months and is recorded by John in his first 4 chapters.

Why has Mark not included these things? Mark wants to get us to the main point. Mark wants to move swiftly to the centre of the action. And while those events are not insignificant, it was Jesus' ministry in Galilee where the public presentation of Jesus to Israel will really take place. If you want to boil down the message of Jesus to a sentence, His preaching in Galilee is what will do it.

He has come up to Galilee, and here He will minister for 18 months. If you imagine a map of Israel, Jerusalem is in the south, and Galilee is to the north. Why did Jesus go here for 18 months? Two reasons:

- 1) Jesus had come to present Himself as Messiah to the nation of Israel, and the greatest single concentration of Jews was in the land of Galilee.
- 2) The Galilean Jews were not as religiously proud and rigid as the Jews living near Jerusalem; they would be much more likely to be receptive to Jesus' offer of Himself.

So, Jesus comes to Galilee and what does He do?

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Notice, the thing that Jesus did was come preaching. Before He ever did anything in the way of healing or performing miracles, He preached. This is really a summary statement for the ministry of Jesus – He preached. The miracles were only to confirm what He preached. Jesus is the Word, and before laying down His life as an offering, He preached.

What did He preach? Verse 14 tells us.

He preached, "the gospel of the kingdom of God." The message Jesus preached was the good news of the kingdom of God. What was the good news of the kingdom of God? Well, Mark tells us what Jesus said in His preaching.

*"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."*

What would Jews have understood by the words 'the time is fulfilled'? Remember, this was a nation that had heard many prophets predicting many future events for Israel. To say, 'the time is fulfilled' is to say, the wait is over. The time has come to completion, the thing you have waited for is here. What is here? The kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom has drawn near.

Now, how did the Jews expect the kingdom? They expected Daniel 7 – the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great glory, destroying the fourth kingdom, redeeming Israel from political subservience, and giving it back its Solomonic glory. Here is this preacher saying that the prophecies are being fulfilled in front of them, and that the kingdom has come. He is not destroying the Romans. To be sure, He is doing incredible miracles. If anyone has power to be Messiah, it is He. But He does not seem to be crushing Israel's enemies. So you can imagine a kind of puzzled confusion. Is He or isn't He? Has the kingdom come or hasn't it?

What the Jews could not understand was that the kingdom of God had two sides. It was both visible and invisible. It was both present and future. It was both already and not yet.

It's not that the Old Testament texts were incorrect in speaking of a future, visible, messianic kingdom. It's that before that kingdom could come, Israel had to accept the King Himself.

God's kingdom is God's rule over men. And before you have an earthly, political kingdom, the kingdom begins with God ruling in people's hearts, with people bowing the knee to the King.

And this is good news! God's perfect, just, fair, loving rule is to be set up through the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

We shake our heads at the Jews for wanting Jesus to rescue them from Rome, and not worshipping Jesus Himself, but we do a very similar thing. For us, the kingdom is not freedom from Rome. For us the kingdom is a life where we are delivered from sickness, delivered from calamity, catastrophe, tragedy or disaster; a life in which we have enough money to live as middle- to upper-class family; a life free from crime, disease, war or suffering of any kind. We might not call that 'the kingdom', we give it other names – a lifestyle, a standard of living. Many people want Jesus to show how loving He is by giving them all or some of those things. That's the good news of the kingdom to them. God loves me, and ought to give me the things I want.

And although there is a time coming when the world will be delivered from crime, catastrophe, calamity, or conflict - before that future, visible kingdom comes, you must deal with the present, invisible kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ. Before you get the outward, physical benefits of the kingdom, you have to bow the knee to the King.

That's why Jesus gives two instructions here, which are really two sides of one and the same coin. What does He say? In light of the kingdom now being here in your midst in the form of the king, repent and believe in the gospel.

What does *repent* mean? *Repent* means to change your mind. It means to turn in your thinking and attitude. If Jesus is the king, and the king has come to declare Himself, then you must change your mind about who will rule your life. You must stop walking on your own road, doing things your own way. Stop, turn 180 degrees to face King Jesus. Stop going your own way and justifying yourself. Stop going your own way and calling yourself a good person. Turn around.

Once you turn, that leads to the other side of the coin – believe in the gospel. Believe in the good news. What is the good news? The good news is that the King has come. From their vantage point, it would have been to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the promised one, and all their hopes for spiritual and physical deliverance rest on Him. This is what Jesus called people to do. It's what He called them to do at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. It's what He called for when He said: **Matthew 11:28** <sup>28</sup> *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*

From our vantage point, we see that the full gospel is that the King came to die on the cross for our sins, to take our punishment, so that God could clear us of our crimes without being a criminal Himself. The King died and rose again and when we trust in Him, and Him alone to forgive us and make us righteous, God is glorified, and we are justified. This is the good news. We must believe it.

We must not simply *know* it. Knowing is not believing. The demons know that Jesus is the Lord and Saviour. We must not simply *agree* with it. The demons agree that Jesus is Lord and able to save. We must place our full and total trust in it. Believing means hoping, leaning, depending, trusting, looking to, calling upon.

In some way, everyone longs for the kingdom. They long for peace. They want a world without violence, without corruption, war, disaster, poverty, misery. But the dark secret of the human heart is this: we want the kingdom but we do not want anyone to be our king. We want the kind of life we get in the kingdom without a personal relationship to the King.

You cannot have the kingdom without the King. You cannot have the benefits of the kingdom if you refuse to firstly bow the knee to the King Himself. You cannot have the physical, visible side to the kingdom, if you will not by faith, accept the invisible, spiritual side – trusting in the Person and work of the King.

God has made an announcement in the coming of His Son: I intend to rule. I am beginning my rule now, and I will consummate it in the future. The good news is – you can experience the joy of being in the fair, just, good kingdom of God, but not if you want to be your own king. You must repent of that. The offer to repent and believe still stands. Jesus still makes that call.

There was a second call that Jesus extended to some. If you have received the first call, then this second call is for you.

## **II. The Call to Service**

*<sup>16</sup> And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." <sup>18</sup> They immediately left their nets and followed Him. <sup>19</sup> When He had gone a little farther from there, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending their nets. <sup>20</sup> And immediately He called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after Him.*

As Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, He was walking along the Sea of Galilee. The Sea of Galilee is more of a lake, about 21 kilometres by 13 kilometres. As He walked along this lake, He came across two sets of brothers: Andrew and Simon, and James and John. This wasn't the first time He'd met Andrew and Simon. In John 1, we read that Andrew was one of John the Baptist's disciples. Jesus had met him and Simon months earlier in Judea. Luke 5:10 tells us the four were actually partners in the fishing business, so Jesus had probably met them all at the same time. They were probably with him when he changed the water into wine, but it was more of an informal kind of relationship.

Here, months later, Jesus sees them again. He has begun His preaching ministry. They have already seen some of His miracles. He extends a formal call to them to follow Him.

It is important to distinguish between two different calls. Jesus called all people to repent and believe in Him, to acknowledge that He was Messiah and God in the flesh. But Jesus did not call all

men to follow Him as disciples in this sense. This was a call to not only acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, but to assist Him, to identify with Him and travel with Him. Jesus did not expect the whole country to leave their homes and travel with Him. But he extended this special call of service to people who had already believed in Him, and were anxious to further His cause.

Jesus, in speaking to these fishermen, tailor-makes His call to service for them. If you come and serve with Me, I will make you a fisher of men. A regular fisher catches fish and they die, but a fisher of men catches people for their safety and life. In a way, what Jesus is saying is that if you come and serve Me, I will take your natural abilities and use them for the kingdom. I will take what you are and deepen, enhance, and maximise you. I will deepen the significance of your life. Fishermen are ideally suited for evangelism – patience, skill, discernment, persistence, quietness. Come and serve Me, and you will not waste your life and abilities, but you will find them. You will not lose your fishing, you will do it on a whole new level.

Jesus is not calling these men to salvation; He has already done that. He is calling them to serve Him, and to serve Him in a dedicated fashion.

What is the response? In both cases, the men leave their nets and follow Jesus. Just like the call to salvation is *repent* and *believe*, so the call to service is *forsake* and *follow*.

How could James & John leave their father so quickly? Was that right to do? Zebedee had hired servants, he was wealthy, so they were not being unkind to him. We know that Peter continued to have a home in Capernaum that he looked after. They didn't abandon their responsibilities to follow Jesus. But they did have to change their priorities. They did have to sever some bonds which got in the way of devotion. They did have to make sacrifices. They could not live as if Messiah had not called them.

That's the same today. To be called to salvation is also to be called to service. No one is saved to sit. No one is saved to be a spectator. You know that you have been relieved from service to God when God takes you from this earth. As long as you are here, He calls you to serve.

Now the call is not exactly like the call to these men, for Jesus is not physically with us. But the principle is very similar. A call to serve involves some leaving and some following. You cannot serve Christ without leaving some things. It might be a job that calls on you to compromise. It might be a kind of living standard that has no place for financial giving to missions. It might be a certain social scene.

If you have never had to make any serious adjustments to your life for the cause of Christ, then I must ask you, are you serving Him? This world is no friend to Christ. Its priorities are different. Its pleasures are different. It does not expect you to give up time, talent, money to worship and love and honour One whom you know by faith. And so if you never do anything which is counter-culture, which causes you to lose something or have to forsake something the world esteems, perhaps it is because you are going with the world's momentum. When you choose to serve Christ, there will be some clashes between this world's priorities and Christ's. There may be some division between you and your family, if they do not know Christ. There may be some division between you and friends.

But think for a moment what went through the minds of these men when Jesus called them. Here is the Messiah, God in flesh, approaching them with a personal invitation to assist Him. The choice is – go on fishing, and live a fairly comfortable life, or embrace a more difficult life for the

inestimable privilege of assisting the Messiah Himself. No wonder they dropped their nets where they were.

This is the privilege that you and I have. God, the Creator, comes to us and calls us to be co-labourers with Him. He invites us to work for Him and with Him. Could there be anything more meaningful, more significant, more fulfilling than to be involved in what God is doing in the world?

David Livingstone gave much of his life in service for God as a missionary in Africa. He wrote this toward the end of his life: "People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which simply pays back a small part of the great debt we owe God? Is anything a sacrifice when it brings its own blessed reward in healthful activity, consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter. Away with such a thought. It is not sacrifice – it is a privilege!"

The call to service is not necessarily a call to forsake your job. Instead, it is a call to forsake what hinders you in serving God. Christ's promise is that He will take what you do and love to do, and turn it into something for the kingdom. He also promised this:

**Matthew 10:39** <sup>39</sup> *"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."*

Only one life to live, soon past, only what's done for Christ will last. The Christian message is not only that God saves your soul from hell in salvation, it is also that God saves your life from meaninglessness and vanity and futility in service. He not only gives you forgiveness from sin, He gives you the honour and meaningfulness of serving Him.

These two are so close together, that it is hard to imagine someone who has truly accepted the one call, who refuses the other. How can you be truly saved from your sin, having bowed the knee to the King, if you refuse to serve Him after that? What kind of salvation would that be? I've been saved from my sin so I can live for myself? I've been saved from ignoring Jesus so I can continue to do that? No, anyone who has been saved from sin longs to find a way to serve Christ.

An elderly lady was almost an invalid, but wanted to serve Christ. She knew the one thing she could do was play the piano. So she put an ad in the paper offering to play any hymn for free over the phone to anyone who would call. Calls began coming in, and within a few months she'd received hundreds of calls from lonely and depressed people, whom she had the chance to minister to. She said, "That became the most rewarding thing I ever did in my life."

The Christian message is not a complicated one, and it need never be a confusing one. God is going to rule the world. He calls everyone now to turn away from self-rule and believe in His Son Jesus Christ as the way of forgiveness and righteousness. To those who do, He calls them to a life of service – labouring with Him to spread the message of the kingdom. Have you responded to those calls?