

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“The Call to Follow”
Mark 1: 9-20
New City Church of LA
September 21, 2008

I. Vision of New City

Welcome to New City. We are a brand new multi-ethnic multi-socioeconomic come-as-you-are church right here in downtown LA.

Our vision is to be an inclusive gospel-centered community of lovers of Jesus Christ who connect people to God, grow together, serve the city, and extend God’s Kingdom.

Our dream is to be an inclusive community where you can come as you are, whether you are black, Latino, Anglo, or Asian, whether you are poor living in Skid Row or rich living in a penthouse loft, whether you are a Democratic Obama supporter or a Republican McCain supporter, whether you are gay or straight, whether you are living a morally upright lifestyle or a morally loose one. We want this to be an inclusive community where anyone can come as they are.

Our dream is to be a gospel-centered community whose primary mission is to declare and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not a community that is ultimately about family values, ethics, or morals, but we are a community that is ultimately about how we have failed in our values, ethics, and life, and how God rescued us from the mess we’ve created. We are a community of people who are more sinful than we think we are and more loved by God than we ever imagined possible. We are a community of sinners living in God’s grace.

Our dream is to become a loving and honest community where we are real to one another, love one another, put down our masks, and develop an authentic community.

We want to be a community where you can be emotional honest, where you don't have to be up all the time, and intellectually honest, where it is okay to ask and even doubt.

Our dream is to be lovers of Jesus Christ and seek Him for the pleasure of His company, and not for what He can do for us or what we think we can do for Him.

Our dream is to connect people to God by connecting them to this church, where they can find transformation and hope through a relationship with God. We want to create a church where we can bring our friends. We want our church to be for people who don't go to church.

Our dream is to grow together. We want to love God and love one another more. We believe that the gospel transforms us, the Holy Spirit empowers us, spiritual disciplines place us where God can transform us, and we believe transformation happens in the context of community.

Our dream is to serve the city, not just by sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, but by living out the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will serve the city because God loves the city and we love the city. We will not only serve the needy, lost, and the marginalized, but we will include them in our fellowship.

Our dream is to extend the Kingdom of God. We are not interested in becoming a mega-church. We want to be a church planting church where we multiply the impact for the Kingdom of God. We want to start a movement of church planting in Los Angeles and participate in the church planting movements around the world.

This is our dream. This is our vision. Welcome to New City Church.

II. Introduction to the Series on Book of Mark

Last Sunday, we started a series on the Book of Mark.

We said that there's been a lot of interest about Jesus lately. But, everyone has a different take on Jesus. A lot of people don't like the church but they like Jesus, but they like him on their own terms. The problem with that is that Jesus on your own term is just a projection of yourself or what you want. And this Jesus can't change you, because it's just your own projection. He can't challenge you and he can't correct you. Only the REAL JESUS can change you. If you want the real Jesus, you have to see the REAL JESUS. I think Mark is arguably the best places to go for the real Jesus, the raw, unadulterated, unfiltered, straight-up Jesus.

III. Review of the passage

Let's read Mark 1:9-20

9At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

When Jesus was baptized, we are shown a picture of the Triune God (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit). We see **God the Father** affirming Jesus as the Son of God; we see **God the Son** being affirmed, and we see **God the Spirit** descending on him like a dove. I can't go into this in detail today, but we believe in a Triune God: One God in three persons. We don't believe in three Gods; we believe in one God (we are monotheist) but we believe in three personhood of God. There are many analogies but they all fail. It's not like different roles, like I can be a Father to my kids and a son to my father and an influence to my friends. It's not quite like the sun, heat, and light OR liquid, gas, and ice, although that's how I made sense of it for a long time. They are three distinct persons (not just roles or modes) but one God. If you don't understand what this means or it doesn't make sense to you, you probably got it right. We're talking about God, the creator of heavens and the earth. Do you expect him to fit into our box of comprehension? We are a finite being and he is an infinite being. How does the finite ever get to know the infinite? Only by revelation. It is only if the infinite being somehow comes to us in a way we can understand and reveals himself to us. We can

never know God on our own (except from what has been created). It's logically impossible. When he does reveal himself to us, we cannot put him into the limitations of our own comprehension.

Let's continue:

12At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, 13and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

We see that God didn't just show up as a sort of a superman God, he came to us as a weak human being. Like all of us, he was tempted. Like all of us, he was limited by his physical body, he got hungry, he experienced pain, he experienced struggles. Yet, without sin.

Let's go on:

14After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

16As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18At once they left their nets and followed him.

19When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Now, we hear Jesus for the first time: He declares that the Kingdom of God is near and calls us to repent, believe, and follow. This is unique in Jewish tradition because rabbis didn't go around looking for disciples. Disciples looked for rabbis. But, Jesus came calling first. When he called, it changed the history of the world. The little episode here changed the course of history. The call of Jesus is still a powerful thing and Jesus is still calling us. So, we need to know more about his call to us.

And this passage tells us that His call is (1) different, (2) drastic, and (3) developmental.

IV. First, His Call is Different

The first thing Jesus started to proclaim was the good news of God. The word for good news here in the original language is *euaggelion* which literally means good news. It is most often translated as “gospel.” But, the Bible translators here leave the literal meaning of the word in the sentence. This word was used in secular environments. We have an inscription from about the same time as the writing of this Book, around 60AD, that starts like this: “The beginning of the gospel (good news) of Caesar Augustus” and it’s the story of his birth and coronation. It was life changing, history making news.

In BC 490, Persians were invading Athens. Everyone expected the Persians to win. But, Athenians won this historic “live or die” battle. A messenger ran from the battle to Athens, about 26 miles, and declared the good news (*euaggelion*) of victory. And then he collapsed and died. The battle is remembered as the Battle of Marathon.

The message of Jesus is not advice. It is **news** of a life-changing historical event.

This is very different than religion: Religion is advice. Gospel is news. Religions say this is what you have to do. Christianity says this is what was done for you!

If you hear people tell you a great moral teaching, and tell you how you ought to live. Do you hear it like the Athenians who heard the good news of the victory? It might inspire you but it’s not the gospel. Moralism is not the good news that Jesus came to deliver. He didn’t come to say repent and fix your life. He said, repent and believe the good news.

I think this is the most misunderstood thing about Christianity. It is not religion where the primary teaching is about what we have to do to reach God, what we have to change, what laws we have to follow. Our society so assumes this that when we call people to Jesus, people automatically assume that we are calling them to a religious life where it is all about dos and don’ts and what we have to do to appease God and earn his favor.

The call of Jesus is good news that God accepts you unconditionally no matter what, not based on what you have done, how good you are, how put together you are, but based on what Jesus has done for you. That's why it's good news that doesn't just inspire you; it changes the direction of your life.

Second reason why the call of Jesus is different is because it's about the coming of the Kingdom of God. Jesus declared that the Kingdom of God is near. Then, as you will see, Jesus goes around teaching about this Kingdom and demonstrating the power of the Kingdom of God. What is the Kingdom of God? Matthew calls it the Kingdom of Heavens. Or put another way, it is heaven. John calls it eternal life. They all mean the same thing. Jesus is declaring that heaven is not just a place we go to when we die, it is a place that has come to us now.

The first time I realized this was one of the most life-changing moments of my life. I was in high school. I had just become a Christian. For the first time, I received Jesus into my life. I was so excited about receiving forgiveness of sins and going to heaven. I was assured that I was going to heaven. I thought it was great. I don't think I had that assurance before, and for the first time, I had that assurance based on what Jesus has done for me to forgive me of my sins. BUT, after awhile, my life as a Christian didn't seem all that fun. My essential attitude was that of thanksgiving for heaven but thinking that earth was a drag. I was looking forward to the future but life was a drag.

Then, someone opened my eyes to the Kingdom of God. It was a sermon by a guest speaker that changed my life. For the first time, I came to realize that we can experience the Kingdom of God now. Kingdom of God is not just the future. It is now. When I first heard it, it completely reverberated through my body. I remember how I ended up in a little room behind the sanctuary, just crying uncontrollably. The Kingdom of God is near. Think about the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallow be thy name, THY KINGDOM COME!" Jesus taught us to pray that thy Kingdom Come. Where? Here to us NOW! When Nicodemus came to Jesus, Jesus said you enter into the Kingdom of God when you are born again by the Spirit. He didn't say we enter into the Kingdom of God when we die, he said we enter into the Kingdom of God when we are born again.

This means we can experience heaven on earth. Our lives are not meant to a drag until we get to heaven. God wants us to experience the power of the Kingdom of God now. It's not a promise that you won't face difficult circumstances in life. It's a promise that we will find peace and joy even in midst of difficult circumstances.

We will learn more about the Kingdom of God in Mark because Jesus focused his teachings on what this Kingdom is about.

- When the Kingdom of God comes into our lives, the presence of God will saturate your life. He will be with us.
- When the Kingdom of God comes into our lives, he will declare victory over the darkness and evil and self-centeredness that rule our hearts. He will empower us and change us.
- When the Kingdom of God comes into our lives, he will free us from the bondage we have to addictions and sin. He will liberate us!

And this is just the beginning. The Kingdom of God has been inaugurated. The good news is that we don't get into this Kingdom by hard work; we get into it by accepting his call to enter.

And someday, this Kingdom of God will be completed. We now live in between the times where the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated but not fully completed.

- We are living in between the times. We are living between the first and the second coming of Jesus.
- One day, all of evil will be destroyed and removed. There will be no more pain, no more loneliness, no more emptiness, no more selfishness, no more racism, no more poverty, no more injustice, no more oppression, and no more death. There will be a renewal of the earth; there will be a new city of God.
- But, the exciting news in the mean time is that this Kingdom has already been inaugurated. We can experience bits and pieces of this Kingdom now. We can experience God's presence and realm now in our daily lives.

So, the call of Jesus is different. It is different because it is good news (not more religious requirements) and different because it is about the inauguration of the Kingdom of God now and here.

V. **Second, His Call is Drastic.**

When Jesus called, Simon Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed him. James and John left their father Zebedee in the boat and followed him. We know from other parts of the story that they did fish again and they did talk to their parents again. But, his call to follow is radical. In our culture, leaving our family is not big deal. But, in a traditional culture, this was a huge deal. Maybe we can identify more with leaving their nets because in many ways, leaving our career is a big deal in our culture since so much of our identity and self worth is tied to our careers. Jesus is saying that following me has to be the main thing. Everything else is second. You must leave everything and follow me. His call is drastic.

When people hear stuff like this, their radar goes up. I don't want to be a fanatic. They're afraid of fanaticism. I think it's a legitimate fear. So much violence is done by religious fanatics. And we don't just have to think about terrorist. Most of us know religious people who are narrow-minded, abusive, and intolerant.

So, how do most people try to resolve this issue of fanaticism? Most people think of religion as a spectrum. On the one side: there are people who are SOO Christian and they over believe. On the other side, there are people who say they believe but don't really live by their beliefs—kind of cultural adherents. So, we say, why don't we just be in the middle? Religion has be cut with water. Moderation in all things.

Is that what Jesus said? In Luke 14:25, Jesus said:

26"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.

How moderate?? What? "If anyone comes to me"—he doesn't say, I need a few good men. He said, "if anyone comes to me." There is no double standard. You have to hate your father, mother, your spouse, your children, you have to hate even you own life.

Pretty drastic! Now, what is hate? Because Jesus said you are to love everyone, even your enemies. He is not calling us to hate *actively* but *comparatively*. I want you to love me so much, that all of the other attachments look like hate.

So, we don't come to God saying: I will follow you IF you do this and that, IF you give me this or that. If you say that, what is on the other side of the "if" is your real God. Jesus is saying, If you are going to follow me, I must be the goal, I must be your end. Don't come to me as a means to get something else. Come to me for me. Come to me because I am your joy, because I am your love, because I am your king, because I am your ultimate reality.

Now, what about the fanaticism? In religion, you have a connection with God because of your right living, because you lived up to the dos and don'ts. Because you are righteous by works. If this is the case, then, if you are a fanatic, you're going to feel superior and judgmental. There's no getting around it.

But the gospel says God loves you and accepts you not because of what you have done but because what he has done on the cross to forgive your sins. So, you expect others to be better than you because you are not saved by works.

The fanatics' problem is NOT that they have gone too far; it is that they have not gone far enough. They might be fanatically bold but not humble. They have not gone far enough. They have only selectively become like him. If you are extremely and fanatically committed to Christ, then you will be extremely kind, extremely accepting, extremely loving, extremely understanding, extremely sacrificial, extremely humble. If you only go half way with Jesus, you might be judgmental to others.

VI. Third, His Call is Developmental. It's a process.

Jesus said, come follow me, I will make you fishers of men. If you look at the tense of the sentence in the original language, a more accurate translation would be: "I will make you become fishers of men." When we follow, we don't instantaneously become fishers of men; it's a process of becoming. He didn't just say come to me; he said to follow me. He takes us on a *journey of becoming* fishers of men.

What does he mean by fishers of men? In Biblical imagery, sea is chaotic and dark place and represents this world. It is the sea of self-centeredness. It's a realm of

destruction. It's the realm of the devil. It's the kingdom of the world under the dominion of darkness. What is Jesus saying? Having inaugurated the Kingdom of God, he is saying, I will make you become people who draw people out of Kingdom of Darkness and into the Kingdom of God.

This means that you are someone who lives in the Kingdom and knows the joys of the Kingdom, the power of the Kingdom, and the radical nature of the Kingdom, and you know you're there not because of something you did right but purely based on God's grace and love for you, then you naturally invite others into this Kingdom.

But, it's a process. The disciples are trained and taught. They got to know Jesus and hung out with him. We'll see that they didn't do so well in the beginning. They often looked like bumbling idiots.

The Kingdom of God is a process. Our relationship with God is a process. I am not going to tell you that everything is going to be hunky dory if you follow Jesus. Sometimes, it's going to be difficult. It is a process of growth. It's a journey in a relationship with God. But, I'll tell you that journey is fun. I think it is hedonistic in that we experience pleasure we can't even imagine. We get to experience heaven now. We get to experience the ultimate now. Although not fully, even a little of the ultimate blows us away. It's no longer a life tossed by the wind. It is a life in the Kingdom of God. I'll tell you that as we learn more and more about this Kingdom, it's going to blow you away. It's awesome.

I want to end by asking you a question: Do you want to follow him? Do you want to experience the Kingdom of God now? Do you want to start this journey with Jesus?

For those who have been following for a while, I have a question: Have you been following Jesus in moderation? Do you want to go all the way with Jesus? Do you want love him so much that everything else looks like hate?