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PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD
FROM MARK CHAPTER 1

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PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD
FROM MARK CHAPTER 1

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For Maddy, Ellie, Molly, and Charlotte; that their hearts may be captured by the One who ransoms His bride from the nations in power, love, humility, and sacrifice.

For Bethy; if you think I love you . . . well, baby, you're right.

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PREFACE

It is impossible for me to measure the influence that the study of biblical theology has had in both my life and ministry. One who studies biblical theology is studying the way the Bible is read and how all the individual parts fit together. It informs and deepens and stretches the way that every text in the Bible is read. My preaching, personal devotions, and the way I see life itself has been deeply impacted by the books and articles I have read, the lectures I have heard, and the discussions I have had while working on this project. I am deeply indebted to those who have helped me see the grand story of God's redemptive plan that is woven through the pages of the Bible.

I first want to thank my father, Dr. Derek Coleman, who pushed me to pursue further education. If not for his counsel and encouragement, I never would have entered a doctoral program. His example of tireless effort and dedication to his work taught me the value of Paul's words when he said, "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

I want to express gratitude to Dr. James Hamilton, who pioneered this degree in biblical theology. His lectures and interaction pushed me to think deeply about the biblical text and to strive to think how the biblical authors thought. I am also thankful to my supervisor, Dr. Brian Vickers, for his helpful comments and for stretching me to become a better writer. The corrections he made to my earliest chapter submissions were both extensive and time consuming to fix, but through them I gained a better understanding of how to organize an argument and maintain a fixed flow of thought. The congregation I serve would also like to extend their gratitude to him as well!

I am thankful for faithful brothers who discussed these texts with me and

deepened my understanding. Jon Canler, Jonathon Woodyard, Spencer Settles, Brian Pate, and Brent Dunbar, I am forever grateful for the time you spent interacting with my ideas, stimulating my thought, and helping me love the Bible more. Your lives inspire me to dig deeper into God's word to see the glories contained therein.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Beth. There is no way to count the hours you spent listening to me work out the thought behind these chapters, watching our precious girls while I sat hunched over a computer late into the night and even early morning, and giving constant encouragement and support. I hope that my time spent in this project has helped me love you more deeply than I did before. Love you to the moon and back, sweet girl.

Finally, words could never express my thankfulness to God. What a beautiful, intricate, soul-stirring plan of redemption he displays in his Word! Planned by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied with power by the Spirit, the story of redemption is an anthem to the praise of his glorious grace. I hope I have captured a measure of the beauty of this plan with my work here.

Dustin Coleman

Countryside, Illinois

May 2017

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On June 6, 1944, a young soldier sits huddled in a Higgins boat as it approaches the shores of Normandy at Omaha beach. As land draws near, he lifts his head from staring in silent anxiety at the ground between his feet to behold a harrowing scene before him. Cliffs rise high above the sandy shores and are lined with artillery fixed on his position. On top of the sand are various obstacles wrapped in barbed wire and hidden beneath the sand are mines poised to detonate at the slightest touch. His heart starts to sink as he realizes that these are most likely his last moments on earth. His thoughts wander to lazy summer afternoons in his hometown, the smiling face of his mother, and the sweet sound of his newborn daughter resting quietly on his chest. He is suddenly jarred back to reality by the voice of his commanding officer sounding over the rain, the waves, and the roar of engines, calling out the order to begin the assault. What drives him forward? What moves him to take that first step toward certain death?

The soldier is moved forward by the themes and principles that shape his reality. The enemy is clearly defined, his heart is fixed on a vision of an ideal that is worth defending even with his own life, and he is convinced that stepping out of the boat and onto the beach will achieve an end greater even than his own life. The hands and feet move at the impulse of the heart; the stories and realities that one is convinced shapes the world around them are what drive the decisions one makes and the actions one takes.

Preachers must approach the task of preaching in light of this understanding. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that great preaching is always dependent upon the preacher's

ability to tie what is said in the text to the grand themes and stories that shape reality.¹ Great preaching that drives people's lives to action must go beyond mere grammatical exegesis of particular texts. Preaching that moves and engages the heart and shapes behavior takes place when preachers tie the text they are preaching into the great and glorious story that the Bible tells us shapes reality. Preachers need to understand the text they preach to their congregations through a biblical theological lens, tying each particular text to the overarching narrative of the Bible. The following project displays how one would preach a section of Scripture, the first chapter of Mark's Gospel, while paying close attention to how biblical theology informs the meaning of the text.

The Importance of Biblical Theology

In J.R.R. Tolkien's classic children's novel *The Hobbit*, the protagonists find themselves hopelessly lost in the dark forest of Mirkwood. After losing the path and growing weary of the endless and dreadful mysteries of the forest, Thorin, the leader of their expedition, cries, "Is there no end to this accursed forest? Somebody must climb a tree and see if he can get his head above the roof and have a look around. The only way is to choose the tallest tree that overhangs the path."² Their only hope of finding their way was to gain a bird's eye view of the whole landscape to make sense of their current position amid the seemingly endless turns and twists of the forest's scrambled path.

Many Christians today feel like Thorin and his company as they attempt to wade through the Bible. Without an understanding of the contours of the biblical narrative, many lose their sense of direction and are unable to make sense of what they read. What biblical readers need is a way to climb to the top of the tallest tree to behold the overall picture so that they can then understand each individual part in light of that

¹D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching & Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 20-21.

²J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 159.

view. This is why biblical theology is vital to biblical understanding and thus biblical preaching. Biblical theology consists of determining the overall storyline of Scripture and then interpreting each of the individual sections of Scripture in light of this story.³

The Necessary Components of Biblical Theology

Understanding the Scriptures through the lens of biblical theology requires a two-pronged approach: determining the whole and interpreting the parts. The first task of biblical theology is to identify a working summary of the main narrative of the Bible, to climb to the highest tree to take a look at the whole scene of the story. Rather than trying to boil down the Bible's message to a single theme or series of themes, biblical theology seeks an overview of the story told in the Bible from beginning to end. The significance of each individual passage in Scripture can be fully appreciated only when it is seen in light of the whole.⁴

Some scholars, including James Barr, doubt the possibility of determining a single, coherent theological narrative of the whole Bible. The task of biblical theology in Barr's opinion is merely to describe the theology of individual texts "as it existed or was thought or believed within the time, languages, and cultures" of that text only.⁵ He is

³See Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 59-75, for a thorough description of biblical theology defined as determining the overall storyline of Scripture. A drawback of this book as a whole, however, is that in defining different approaches to biblical theology it creates a false division of biblical theology into separate and independent schools. Klink and Lockett differentiate between approaches to biblical theology that focus on storyline of Scripture, the worldview of redemption, and a canonical study of the Bible. This is an impossible division to make, as it is necessary to hold all three together in applying true biblical theology. The storyline of Scripture reveals a worldview of God's redemptive work of mankind, which is discovered by working canonically through the text. James Hamilton discusses the practice of seeing each individual passage in light of that overall storyline. James Hamilton, "Biblical Theology and Preaching," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 196.

⁴Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2003), 28. Dempster illustrates: "To use an analogy from the field of photography, if one is constantly using the zoom lens on a piece of sculpture such as Mount Rushmore, one will note the worn surface of some rocks and the sedimentary contours of others. But unless one is able to step back with a wide-angle lens and take in 'the big picture,' the point of it all has been lost."

⁵James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM

right to stress the importance of culture, language, and historical context in the interpretation of individual texts. However, by defining biblical theology only as a description of things believed at particular times and particular places, he misses that the Bible is narrating a story that is bound by neither. Biblical theology is not a description of what was believed as various time periods recorded in the Bible—rather, it is grasping how individual texts serve as scenes in the larger narrative.

This first task of understanding the grand narrative of the Bible then leads to the second task of biblical theology, which is striving to understand individual sections of Scripture in light of that narrative. As James Hamilton writes, “We want to understand the organic development of the Bible’s teaching so that we are interpreting particular parts of the story in light of the whole.”⁶ After one gains an understanding of the whole narrative, individual components of the story become clearer. This involves looking at what events occur before and after the text being considered. The theological thrusts and symbolism of earlier Scripture sheds light on what comes after and the later development of those elements helps one to understand what comes before.⁷

This biblical theological process must be held in conjunction with thorough exegesis that fully appreciates the specific historical context of each passage.⁸ Understanding a particular text always begins with thorough exegesis. Biblical theology should be seen as another tool in interpreting that text, to be placed in the exegete’s toolbox alongside those that analyze language and context. Biblical theology does not

Press, 1999), 4. Barr doubts the possibility of doing what he calls a “pan-biblical theology” since the Old Testament and New Testament were written in different languages, at different times, in different cultures.

⁶James Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 12.

⁷G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 3.

⁸Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*, 2. Here I agree with Barr that biblical theology is not first and foremost a theological endeavor but that it is always borne out of thorough biblical exegesis. It simply cannot be done without deep interaction with texts in their own context.

highjack contexts to support its theme but rather gives another lens through which to view a passage after historical-grammatical exegesis has been done. This helps the biblical theologian pay attention to the *way* biblical authors describe and explain the Scripture's overall story. A study of individual texts in its own right reveals the symbols, pictures, and language used to tell the story.⁹

Clearly, the two components of biblical theology complement each other. One gains an understanding of the overall storyline as multiple parts of Scripture are understood, which in turn gives a greater understanding to those individual parts, and so on. Biblical theology is an ever-deepening spiral, with the study of the whole contributing to the understanding of the part and the understanding of the part influencing how one puts together the whole. As T. Desmond Alexander explains, "Each book contributes something special to the meta-story and, in turn, the meta-story offers a framework within which each book may be best interpreted."¹⁰

The Result of Biblical Theology

The result of correctly practicing biblical theology in the interpretation of texts is that one learns how to understand the Bible as God intends. As Hamilton reminds, "Studying biblical theology is the best way to learn from the Bible how to read the Bible as a Christian should."¹¹ The primary purpose of practicing biblical theology is to lead the reader to the purposes for which God inspired the Bible and gave it to the church. Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14-17,

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to

⁹Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 61-94.

¹⁰T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008), 10.

¹¹Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 20.

salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.¹²

This text teaches that a Scripture was given to equip Christians for “every good work.” Biblical theology is an interpretive tool that helps readers know “the sacred writings” so that the purpose for which God breathed them may be gained. The end result of practicing biblical theology, then, is twofold. First, biblical theology helps one understand the message of the Bible so that they can have “the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Biblical theology helps one understand the gospel and strengthens their faith in Christ. Second, biblical theology leads one to see how the Bible reproveth, corrects, and trains in righteousness so that Christians can be perfectly equipped to do what is good in every situation.

The Importance of Preaching

An excerpt from Emma Lazarus’s sonnet “New Colossus” is etched upon a plaque mounted to the Statue of Liberty. It reads, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!” Like battered immigrants approaching the shores of Ellis Island, people stream into church sanctuaries on Sunday morning like “huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” They live life weighed down by sin and its effects, wearied by a fallen world without and a fallen heart within. These weary travellers need a bastion of hope, standing before them with arms raised, lifting a lamp to shine light on their sin-darkened souls.

No other light can turn back this darkness but the light of “the prophetic word made more sure . . . a lamp shining in a dark place” (1 Pet 1:19). These pilgrims need God’s prophetic word declared to them boldly, to see revelation held up as a light shining

¹²All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

in a dark place—simply put, they need preaching. Not just any preaching, however, will do. They do not need what John Piper calls “moral or psychological pep talks about how to get along in the world.”¹³ They do not need bare theological principles either, what Jay Adams calls “naked proclamations of truth,” but rather truth rooted in history.¹⁴

Biblical theology outlines the Bible’s view of how history progresses and informs us how God works in and through that history.¹⁵ Employing biblical theology in preaching ensures that the preacher does not give simple steps to better living or isolated tenets of theology and practice but rather demonstrates how the truth presented in each passage is shown to be but one ray of light emanating from the lamp of God’s redemptive plan. Those who listen to preaching need to hear the grand story of God’s work throughout history and how that work should shape their hearts and lives on a daily basis.

The Stages of God’s Redemptive Plan

What is this story found in the Bible? The storyline of the Bible consists of events and their subsequent consequences that build the plot and bring about its resolution.¹⁶ Four major events of the biblical story frame the narrative. The following table shows the four major events and their subsequent consequences for the relationship between God and mankind.¹⁷

¹³John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 15.

¹⁴Jay Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 15.

¹⁵Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 27.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷The following table is adapted from a diagram in David Wenham, “Unity and Diversity in the New Testament,” which is an appendix in George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 712-13. As Wenham argues, this outline of the biblical story is not comprehensive. For example, it could be said that a new type of existence was brought about by the presence of God in the midst of Israel through the tabernacle and temple. However, while introducing a new degree of relationship with God, God’s presence in the midst of Israel does not make a fundamental change in the nature of human existence. See, however, James Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments* (Nashville: Baker Academic, 2006), who argues that God’s people did experience regeneration in the Old Testament.

Table 1. Stages of the biblical story

<i>Major Event</i>	<i>Resulting Stage</i>
God creates the heavens, earth, animals, and mankind	Mankind lives with God in unhindered fellowship and harmony with the created order (Gen 1-2)
Adam rebels against God	Mankind's fellowship with God is broken; onset of the Old Age: creation is now marred by sin, death, and Satan; God begins to foreshadow his redemptive work through the nation of Israel (Gen 3 – the end of the Old Testament canon)
The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ	The New Age is inaugurated in the midst of the Old Age (Gospels); mankind can be reconciled to God in Christ and enjoy life in the Spirit but the curse of the Old Age is still present (New Testament epistles)
The return of Jesus to establish God's Kingdom on earth	New Age reigns unfettered by the Old; all enemies of God are defeated; God's people enjoy eternal, unhindered fellowship with God (Rev 20-22)

Every passage in Scripture exists in this flow of narrative and either narrates a significant event or describes life in the stage that results from one of these events. No event or stage is isolated from the others. The major events move the plot forward, both providing development from the previous stage and setting the tone for the subsequent

one. Every event or stage is both a continuation of what comes before and a force that shapes what follows. This truth has immensely important implications for preaching.

Preaching the Whole Bible in Every Text

There is a current that sweeps through the biblical narrative that constantly flows toward the resolution of the plot. At any given point in the river of the narrative, a passage is being rushed over with water that flows from previous events and stages and at the same time is being pushed downstream, toward the events and stages that complete the story. Preaching using biblical theology means that the preacher has in mind both the prior events and stages that shape the current passage as well as the resulting future realities the text anticipates.

When preaching a text, the preacher should come with biblical theological questions. Does this passage narrate a major event? In what stage of the story of redemption does this passage occur? How do prior events and stages influence this particular text? Where does the story go from here? How does this text influence or anticipate future events and stages in the story? When the preacher roots each text he preaches in biblical theology, he is rooting the truth of that passage into the story of God's interaction with humanity and thus brings all of God's redemptive work to bear on the particular text he is preaching.

This doctoral project focuses on preaching the first chapter of the gospel of Mark from a biblical theological standpoint. The gospel of Mark narrates a major event in the storyline, namely, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each passage needs to be held up against prior and subsequent events and stages. The preacher must ask whether or not elements of creation, of the fall, or of Israel's history are being alluded to or directly addressed.¹⁸ Likewise, he needs to address how the New Covenant relates

¹⁸James Hamilton, "Biblical Theology and Preaching," 195. Hamilton helpfully reminds that Jesus' redemption is the resolution for both the exile from Eden and from Canaan.

to the Old and how biblical truths and imperatives should be seen in light of the final consummation of God's kingdom.

Familiarity with Literature

The following is a survey of the literature vital to a biblical theological preaching of the book of Mark. These resources have been divided into three categories. The first category consists of scholarly commentaries that engage Mark's structure, usage of language, and theological themes. The second category consists of dictionaries that help investigate the background behind words, themes, and images used by the biblical writers. The third category is made up of resources that help analyze the theological significance of the themes. These include whole Bible theologies, New Testament theologies, and monographs that examine particular elements of Mark's theology.

Commentaries

When one studies through a biblical text, they must pay attention to multiple aspects, such as the original languages, the main message of the passage, and how the passage fits in to the message of the Bible as a whole. Scholarly commentaries are an important starting point both for examining these aspects of a passage and finding resources for further study through the bibliographies they provide.

Among commentaries that interact with the Greek text of Mark, by far the most thorough and in depth is the one written by Robert Gundry.¹⁹ Gundry interacts with a myriad of current scholarship, thoroughly engages Greek grammar and lexicography, and leaves virtually no stone unturned in his full treatment which exceeds one thousand pages. Equally as engaging with respect to interaction with the Greek text the volumes authored by Robert Guelich and Craig Evans, respectively, in the Word Biblical

¹⁹Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary of His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

Commentary series.²⁰ Another valuable reference that deals extensively with the Greek of Mark is R. T. France's commentary.²¹

Among other commentaries that engage the Greek but to a much lesser extent are the commentaries provided by C. E. B. Cranfield and Morna Hooker.²² William Lane's commentary on Mark in the New International Commentary on the New Testament does not widely engage the Greek but provides valuable exposition of the main message of each passage and the book as a whole.²³ Two other valuable commentaries that are more theological in nature are those by James Edwards and James Brooks.²⁴

Dictionaries

Dictionaries are a helpful resource in analyzing biblical theological themes, how the biblical authors used different imagery, and for discovering the social and religious backgrounds behind key words and themes. Four main dictionaries will inform the exegesis done in this project. The *Baker Theological Dictionary* analyzes words and themes from a theological standpoint.²⁵ The *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* gives understanding for issues that are of particular note in studying Jesus' life as it is portrayed

²⁰Craig Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34b (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), and Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989).

²¹R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

²²C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentaries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), and Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Continuum, 2006).

²³William Lane, *Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974).

²⁴James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), and James Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991).

²⁵Walter Elwell, ed., *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

in the gospels.²⁶ The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* takes a look at how biblical authors used pictures and themes to tell the story of God's redemption.²⁷ Lastly, the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* examines words and ideas as they are presented through the different stages of the biblical narrative.²⁸

Theological Analysis

Finally, several whole Bible and New Testament theologies will inform the exegesis of this project. James Hamilton's *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* offers a book-by-book analysis of the Bible's main theme, which he claims is the display of God's glory in highlighting his mercy towards his people through the display of judgment on his enemies.²⁹ George Eldon Ladd's New Testament theology does not give a book-by-book analysis but rather examines the theology of each individual New Testament writer.³⁰ G. K. Beale's New Testament theology takes a different approach, choosing to organize the work around themes rather than authors.³¹ Finally, Thomas Schreiner's whole Bible theology is both well written and insightful.³²

Two works that are not biblical theologies themselves but aid in the theological analysis of the Bible as a whole and Mark in particular are Hamilton's *What is Biblical*

²⁶Joel Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992).

²⁷Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: An Encyclopedic Exploration of the Images, Symbols, Motifs, Metaphors, Figures of Speech and Literary Patterns of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998).

²⁸T. Desmond Alexander, et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

²⁹James Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

³⁰George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000).

³¹Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*.

³²Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

Theology? and Rikki Watts' *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*.³³ Hamilton offers an overview of the Bible's main storyline and identifies some of the particular pictures and stories that are traced throughout the Bible's narrative. Watts presents Mark's structure and theology in light of Isaiah's description of Israel's future return from exile in Isaiah 40-55. He offers an important viewpoint for showing how Mark was interpreting Old Testament hopes and how Isaiah's theology of God's future work shaped Mark's presentation of Jesus' life.

Local Context

Out of every one hundred cars that pass through the busy intersection of Joliet Road and Brainard Avenue, ninety-six carry souls whose current ultimate destiny is the wrath of God's eternal judgment in hell.³⁴ Brainard Avenue Baptist Church, which sits on this busy intersection, is located in Countryside, Illinois, a small city nestled in the southwestern suburbs of Chicago. While the church has stood as a faithful witness to the gospel for over fifty years, the last fifteen years have seen the church suffer a considerable decline in influence and effective ministry in the community. Once a bustling family of faith well represented by all generations, the church has seen a decade-long slide in attendance and around two-thirds of the remaining congregation have now passed retirement age.

While the church has dwindled in size and influence, the surrounding community has become larger and less Christian. The community has over 250,000 people living within a five-mile radius of the church. Among those 250,000, two out of every five people have no religious faith at all. The vast majority of the remaining

³³Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, and Rikki Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997).

³⁴An insight garnered through evaluating statistics taken from "Countryside, Illinois (IL 60525) Profile," accessed November 7, 2014, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Countryside-Illinois.html>. Only 4 percent of the existing community identifies with Protestant Christianity. All further community statistics used in this chapter are also drawn from this website.

members of the community identify with religions or denominations that have either lost or never had the biblical gospel. Less than one out of twenty in our community identifies with an evangelical denomination.³⁵ If the current trajectory of Brainard Avenue Baptist Church continues, one of the few remaining flickers of gospel light will be snuffed out. The greatest need at the church is to rediscover a passion for spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to the surrounding community.

Although true Christianity is scarcely found in Countryside and the surrounding community, the initial spread of the gospel began in a similar, if not more difficult, environment. N.T. Wright is worth quoting at length:

The single most striking thing about early Christianity is its speed of growth. In AD 25 there is no such thing as Christianity: merely a young hermit in the Judaeen wilderness, and his somewhat younger cousin who dreams dreams and sees visions. By AD 125 the Roman emperor has established an official policy in relation to the punishment of Christians; Polycarp has already been a Christian in Smyrna for half a century. . . . Why then did early Christianity spread? *Because early Christians believed that what they had found to be true was true for the whole world. The impetus to mission sprang from the very heart of early Christian conviction.* If we know anything about early Christian praxis, at a non- or sub-literary level, it is that the early Christians engaged in mission, both to Jews and to Gentiles [emphasis added].³⁶

Wright's point is that early Christians were convinced that the message about Christ was true for every human being in the world and that this conviction was the fuel that drove passionate, widespread mission. They had the audacious conviction that Israel's Messiah was the hope for the whole world.³⁷ In other words, they believed that what God did in fulfilling promises to Israel through the ministry of Jesus was the key to the salvation of all the nations. This led them to zealous global evangelism.

³⁵The definition of "evangelical" is notoriously difficult to pinpoint. See the discussion in Douglas Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 17-25. I am using the word in a broad sense to describe denominations that have a right understanding of the gospel.

³⁶N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 359-60.

³⁷Darrell Bock, *Acts*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 6. He writes that the early church believed that God's plan of universal salvation was "rooted in ancient promises associated with Judaism and yet includes Gentiles."

It is just that conviction that drives Mark's telling of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Mark aims to show how Jesus brings to fulfillment the storyline of the nation of Israel and that this fulfillment has implications for the salvation of the whole world.³⁸ Mark's main task in his gospel is to present a theology of the Messiah that brings fulfillment specifically to the storyline of Israel.³⁹ Sprinkled throughout his narrative, however, are intimations that Jesus's full mission is the salvation of all the nations.⁴⁰ The full significance of Jesus's ministry and thus his eternal glory in heaven is the song the living creatures sing before his throne: "Worthy are you to take the book and break its seals; for you were slain, and purchased men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev 5:9-10). The early Christians grasped this concept and it extended naturally to passionate evangelism.

This is the conviction that the members of Brainard Avenue Baptist Church need to grasp—that the significance of Jesus' ministry is not ultimately how he makes their lives better but that through his life, death, and resurrection he is calling the nations to reign with him in eternal glory. Their hearts must resonate with the fact that Jesus' ministry does not invite them to simply "get saved" but that they are saved so that they "may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His

³⁸Wright, *The New Testament*, 382. He writes that the gospels are "to be the final scene in the story of the creator god and his covenant people, and hence the penultimate scene . . . in a larger drama still, that of the creator and the world." He is writing here in reference to Luke's gospel, but his argument is that all the gospels show how the fulfillment of Israel's story is necessary to complete the larger storyline of God's relationship to the whole world.

³⁹Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 233. James Edwards also notes, "Every pericope in Mark is about Jesus except for two about John the Baptizer . . . who is presented as the forerunner of Jesus. From start to finish, Jesus is the uncontested subject of the Gospel of Mark." Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 12-13.

⁴⁰See especially Jesus' statement that the end of the ages will not come until the gospel is preached to all the nations in Mark 13:10. James Hamilton also contends that God's eschatological purpose is to reconcile both Israel and the nations when he says, "Israel's prophets promised that through the judgment of exile a glorious eschatological future would dawn, but they were really promising a return from two different exiles – Adam's from Eden and Israel's from the land." Hamilton, "Biblical Theology and Preaching," 195.

marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Grasping the universal significance of Jesus’s ministry leads to mission. Just as the soldier approaching the shores on D-Day is driven forward by his conviction about what is universally right and true, the church must be gripped by their conviction that Jesus Christ is the Jewish Messiah, come to be the Savior of all mankind if they would push forward in passionate mission.

Summary of Biblical Passages

Mark’s task in his gospel is to present “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).⁴¹ Mark shows how Israel’s hopes are fulfilled in the coming of the kingdom of God through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. This kingdom will bring to fulfillment all of the promises of salvation found in the Old Testament, promises that include the salvation not only of the Jews but also all the nations of the earth. Jesus’ mission holds out the hope of salvation for the entire world. The Jewish Messiah comes to redeem Israel but also to give his life as a ransom for all the nations of the world. This sermon series covers Mark’s first chapter, where he introduces many of these themes, in seven sermons.

Mark 1:1-8

In this text, Mark introduces his readers to Jesus’ identity, firmly rooting his ministry in the fulfillment of Old Testament promises regarding God’s eschatological salvation. After beginning the book with a title that reminds the reader of Genesis 1:1,⁴² Mark then quotes from Isaiah⁴³ to introduce Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptizer. John is described as the fulfillment of Old Testament promises as the one sent ahead of God to

⁴¹Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 233.

⁴²Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 23.

⁴³The quotation is actually a combination of three Old Testament texts: Exod 23:20, Mal 3:1, and Isa 40:3. Mark attributes the quotation to Isaiah because it is “deemed the defining element of the tapestry of quotations” and because Isaiah had the most authority in the early church community. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 27.

prepare his way and John's attire is described in terms reminiscent of Elijah, Israel's greatest prophet.⁴⁴ John also introduces Jesus as the one who will baptize in the Holy Spirit, an allusion to multiple Old Testament texts about the promised outpouring of the Spirit.⁴⁵

Not only does this opening passage place the story of Jesus as the continuation of the Old Testament storyline, it also implicitly points to another theme Mark addresses in 6:47-52—the deity of Jesus. Mark emphasizes Jesus' deity in three ways. First, Mark 1:1 applies to Jesus the title “Son of God,” a title emphasizing his unique identification with God.⁴⁶ This title is also given to Jesus by a Roman soldier at the end of the book (15:39), placing Mark's main theological designation of Jesus at both the open and close of the gospel. Second, in 1:2, Mark applies to Jesus Old Testament texts referring to Yahweh. Finally, Mark 1:8 reports how John attributes the ability to pour out the Holy Spirit to Jesus, an activity reserved only for God himself in the Old Testament.⁴⁷ In Jesus, the God of the Old Testament has come to fulfill his promises.

Mark 1:9-13

Mark 1:9-13 shows how Jesus is God's anointed king who has come to inaugurate the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation. In narrating Jesus' baptism and the supernatural events surrounding it, Mark uses Old Testament allusions and quotations to show that Jesus' entry into human history is the beginning of God's plan to save Israel through a Davidic king. After being baptized and installed as God's king, Jesus immediately goes to the wilderness and engages Satan, the kingdom enemy. The

⁴⁴Brooks, *Mark*, 41.

⁴⁵Cf. Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:14; Joel 2:22-29. So Brooks, *Mark*, 41.

⁴⁶Edwards argues that, for Mark, the title “Son of God” is a fuller term than “Messiah” and emphasizes Jesus' deity. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 25.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 33.

result of that encounter is not given in these verses; for Mark, the outcome of the struggle between Jesus and Satan will be unfolded throughout the pages of the gospel.

Mark 1:14-15

The prologue of Mark's gospel, which comprises the first thirteen verses, makes clear that Jesus is the Davidic king who would usher in God's kingdom promised by the Old Testament prophets. Having described who Jesus is, Mark then sets out to explain what Jesus does. As Edwards says, "He is portrayed as a man of action. The action of the Gospel is all-important to the meaning of the Gospel, for we learn who Jesus is not so much from what he says as from what he *does* [emphasis original]."⁴⁸ Mark 1:14-15 shows that this king comes first and foremost as one who proclaims a message.⁴⁹

Jesus announces that God's kingdom has arrived with the onset of his public ministry. This announcement of the arrival of God's kingdom comes with a demand on those who hear it. Those who hear Jesus' kingdom proclamation are called upon to repent and believe in the gospel. The arrest of John the Baptist, who had been the one who prepared the way for this kingdom announcement, shows that repentance and faith may come with suffering and persecution. The kingdom of God will be at odds with the kingdoms of earth.

Mark 1:16-20

Jesus begins his ministry by preaching and then recruiting workers to join him in kingdom proclamation. Jesus summons Peter, Andrew, James, and John to take part in calling people into the kingdom. Mark makes clear that this ministry of Jesus and his disciples signals the end of the exile. He does so by recording that Jesus calls his disciples "fishers of men" in 1:17, a clear allusion to Jeremiah 16:16, where God speaks

⁴⁸Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 13.

⁴⁹France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 89-90.

of restoring Israel from exile as him “fishing” for his children.⁵⁰ The disciples respond by leaving their fathers and occupations to come follow Jesus, a foreshadowing of Jesus’ call to deny oneself and follow after him in 8:34-35.

Mark 1:21-28

The first public act that Mark records is Jesus teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. While Jesus’ authoritative teaching is the key theme of this text, the main action revolves around the exorcism of a man with an unclean spirit. Exorcism plays a significant role in Mark’s presentation of Jesus. Four different exorcisms are recorded (1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29), and Mark often summarizes Jesus’s ministry in an area by mentioning his practice of casting out demons (1:39; 3:10-12). Jesus gives his disciples this authority as well (3:15; 6:7; 9:28 assumes their normal ability to drive out demons). Ladd highlights the importance of Jesus’ engagement with demons: “We must recognize in the exorcism of demons a consciousness on the part of Jesus of engaging in an actual conflict with the spirit world, a conflict that lay at the heart of his messianic mission.”⁵¹

The presence of demon possession in Mark is the “characteristic evidence of the power of Satan” in the world in which Jesus ministers.⁵² By making an exorcism the first act of Jesus’ public ministry, Mark highlights the importance of Jesus’ triumph over the spirit world and thus the power of Satan.⁵³ By engaging in a ministry of complete victory over the evil spiritual world, Jesus demonstrates that he is the seed of the woman who will come and crush the head of Satan, man’s greatest enemy (Gen 3:15). Not only

⁵⁰In this passage God says he will fish for the exiles of Israel to execute judgment on them, but the context of the whole passage is God’s intention to restore them to the land.

⁵¹Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 50.

⁵²Ibid., 49.

⁵³Ibid., 65.

is Jesus' ministry the end of the exile of the people of God, it is the beginning of the end of the influence Satan gained over mankind in the garden. The kingdom of God has come and the kingdom of the serpent has been dealt its crushing blow of defeat.

Mark 1:29-34

After the events in the synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus retires to Simon's house where he engages in an evening of miraculous healing.⁵⁴ This evening of healing demonstrates both Jesus' authority over the pervading power of sickness and death and his compassion on those who suffer under the curse. Healing in Jesus' ministry shows that the kingdom of God, when it comes in full, will eliminate physical suffering for all time. The old creation, corrupted by the curse brought by Adam's rebellion, is characterized by disease and death. Jesus came to show the kingdom into which he calls on people to enter through faith and repentance will be free of those things. When the kingdom arrives in its fullness, death and demons will be banished forever.⁵⁵

Mark 1:35-39

While Jesus displayed great compassion through his ministry of healing, the relief of physical ailment was not the primary purpose of his ministry. Jesus' main purpose was to announce the arrival of God's kingdom to those who needed to hear it. Thus, even though there were more in Capernaum who wished to benefit from Jesus' miraculous powers, he decides to leave. He does so in order that he might go to towns that have not yet heard of the arrival of God's kingdom and proclaim it there. The popularity of Capernaum presented a moment of decision in Jesus' ministry.⁵⁶ The crowds and his disciples wanted him to stay in Capernaum capitalize on his budding

⁵⁴Robert Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 93.

⁵⁵Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 458.

⁵⁶Brooks, *Mark*, 53.

reputation. Jesus, however, was sent forward with a divine commission to announce the arrival of the kingdom where it had not yet been heard, calling on people everywhere to enter into it.⁵⁷

⁵⁷Stein, *Mark*, 102.

CHAPTER 2

MARK 1:1-8: A KING ANNOUNCED

Jesus' first recorded words in Mark's gospel are found in verse 15 of the opening chapter: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." Jesus' declaration of the kingdom's arrival leads to the call to repentance and faith. Given the prominence of the kingdom theme here at the outset of the gospel, the kingdom parables found in chapter 4, Jesus' discussion of who will enter the kingdom in chapter 10, and the prevalence of king/kingdom language found in the Passion narrative (15:2, 9, 12, 16-20, 26, 32, 43), it is impossible to understand Mark's gospel without an understanding of his concept of the kingdom of God.¹ This series of sermons will explore how Mark's opening chapter defines key elements of God's kingdom.

Mark never explicitly describes what he means by "the kingdom of God." In one sense, he does not have to. God had made promises throughout the Old Testament that created the expectation that God would rule over the nations of the earth through the king that he would appoint. This rule and reign would accomplish peace and joy for his people.² At the time of Jesus' arrival, however, Israel had not had a true king for

¹Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 144-45. They write, "One dare not think he or she can properly interpret the gospels without a clear understanding of the concept of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus [emphasis original]. . . . The miracle stories, for example, are not recorded to offer morals or to serve as precedents. Rather, they function as vital illustrations of the power of the kingdom breaking in through Jesus' own ministry."

²T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1998). Alexander shows how the whole Bible explains and describes this king and his reign.

centuries, they had been ruled over by various successive kingdoms, and they lived in subjugation rather than peace and freedom.

Israel clung to promises planted in the Old Testament prophets that alluded to a future working of God to accomplish a great salvation, similar to the exodus from Egypt but grander in scope and effect. God would act again on behalf of his people and re-establish the covenant promises he made to Israel's previous generations.³ Thus the announcement that God's kingdom had come near would have clear implications for God's people. Brian Vickers notes,

When Jesus made the announcement recorded in Mark 1:15, his hearers evidently had no need for an explanation—not yet, at least. For Jews living in first century Israel, with hippodromes and arenas scattered throughout the land and in Jerusalem, Roman standards flying in prominent places, Roman crosses at times lining the roads, Roman soldiers in barracks in the Temple precinct, and with a Roman governor living secure in his palace in Jerusalem, the coming of the “Kingdom” meant deliverance.⁴

Vickers further explains that the announcement of God's kingdom means, “God would deliver his people, as he promised. Their enemies will be destroyed, God will visit his people in a decisive way and Israel will be restored and exalted with God as her King.”⁵ Though Mark does not explicitly define the kingdom in this way, the first chapter of his gospel implicitly makes this same point: the arrival of the kingdom of God means the onset of God's deliverance for his people. In these opening eight verses of Mark's gospel, the forerunner who announces the arrival of this kingdom appears declaring the message that prepares the way for its king.

³Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 187-200.

⁴Brian Vickers, “Mark's Good News of the Kingdom of God,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8, no. 3 (2004): 12.

⁵Ibid.

A Kingdom Announced

The theme of deliverance is evident from the first verses of the opening chapter. In verse 1, Mark announces that his work is “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” This sentence functions as a title to the book.⁶ James Edwards helpfully explains the significance of Mark entitling his work the “gospel”:

For Mark the gospel is the story of salvation in Jesus. The word for “gospel” (Gk. *Euangelion*) literally means “good news.” In both the OT and in Greek literature *euangelion* was commonly used of reports of victory from the battlefield. . . . The concept of “good news” was not limited to military and political victories, however. In the prophet Isaiah “good news” is transferred to the inbreaking of God’s final saving act when peace, good news, and release from oppression will be showered on God’s people (Isa 52:7; 61:1-3). For Mark, the advent of Jesus is the beginning of the fulfillment of the “good news” heralded by Isaiah.⁷

This gospel is centered on a person, Jesus Christ. From the beginning, Mark signals that his work will describe “the inbreaking of God’s final saving act” and that this saving act will take place through a person, Jesus Christ.

In verses 2-3, this gospel of deliverance begins with one who will go before the deliverer to announce his way. Pieter Verhoef explains that it was a common practice in eastern cultures to send “messengers ahead of a visiting king to inform the inhabitants of his coming and to pave the way, to make it passable, literally to remove all the obstacles.”⁸ This messenger fulfills the expectation from multiple Old Testament texts that mighty acts of God are preceded by a forerunner sent to prepare their way. Mark references this pattern through a composite quotation of multiple Old Testament texts. Though he attributes the quotation to Isaiah alone, Mark’s quotation in 1:2-3 is actually a combination of Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3.⁹ When the surrounding

⁶James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 23.

⁷Ibid., 24.

⁸Pieter Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 287.

⁹Mark likely labeled the entire quotation as from Isa because the Isaiah text was the most prominent of the three. Robert Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 42. So too Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 27.

contexts of these citations are taken into account, it is clear that these quotations continue the theme of God's deliverance already alluded to in Mark 1:1.

The first part of the quotation, "Behold I send my messenger ahead of you," comes from Exodus 23:20. The surrounding context is Exodus 23:20-33, where the topic is Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan and God's promise to send an "angel"¹⁰ to "guard you along the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared" (Exod 23:20).¹¹ This angel will go before Israel and, if Israel will truly follow his guidance as God's representative, God promises that he "will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries" (Exod 23:22). When God sends forth his messenger and his people heed his voice, the result is that Israel's enemies will be destroyed and they will dwell securely in the land that God had promised to give them.¹²

Thus the context of this first quotation is possession of the land and the defeat of Israel's enemies. As Graeme Goldsworthy notes, "Throughout the Old Testament, possession of the land is presented as a shadow of the future reality of living as God's people in his kingdom."¹³ God's act of removing enemy nations and bringing the people into the land through his mighty acts in the exodus and subsequent conquest demonstrates his commitment to be king over his people. The context of Exodus 23:20 is God's commitment to act to establish salvation for his people through his kingly conquest and rule, with a messenger that prepares the way before him.

¹⁰It is unclear in the context of Exod 23 whether this "angel" or "messenger" is a divine or human figure. For a discussion of possible explanations, see William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 287.

¹¹Ibid., 287.

¹²John Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 335.

¹³Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 131.

The second quotation, consisting of “who will prepare your way,” comes from Malachi 3:1.¹⁴ The context of Malachi 3:1-6 is God’s promise to send a messenger before his own way, as he comes to judge and refine his people. God promises to come to his people but such a visitation demands that the people prepare themselves by turning from sin and seeking his face. Failure to do so will result in being wiped away in his refining judgment. Yet God ultimately intends this promise of his coming to be a word that repairs the covenantal bonds that were broken in Israel’s sin and her subsequent exile. As Brian Vickers explains, “God comes to judge . . . but he also extends an offer to his people, ‘Return to me and I will return to you’ (Mal 3:7).”¹⁵

Thus while the Exodus quotation focused on God’s messenger working on behalf of God’s people to destroy Israel’s enemies, the Malachi context identifies the focus of the messenger figure as necessary preparation for the people themselves. As Andrew Hill notes, “Clearing the way before Yahweh’s epiphany means removing the ‘obstacles’ of self-interest, spiritual lethargy, and evil behavior embedded in the people of God.”¹⁶ The Lord is coming to visit his people and make them acceptable to himself once more; thus the people need to repent lest they be carried away in his judgment. That will be the mission of the messenger foretold by Malachi that would be sent before God’s arrival. The messenger prepares the way for a decisive act of God to restore his covenant relationship with his people.

The quotation from Isaiah flows from the Exodus and Malachi quotations. Robert Gundry notes, “The preparation of a way in Mal 3:1 now leads to a quotation of

¹⁴Robert Gundry writes, “The similarity of ‘Behold, I am sending my messenger’ to Malachi 3:1, which in the MT and LXX differs only slightly from Exodus 23:20, leads to the quotation of ‘who will prepare your way’ from Malachi 3:1.” Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 35. So too Andrew Hill, *Malachi*, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 25d (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 265, who also sees the quotation as being dependent upon Exod 23:20.

¹⁵Vickers, “Mark’s Good News,” 15.

¹⁶Hill, *Malachi*, 267.

Isaiah 40:3, which also speaks of preparing a way.”¹⁷ Mark finishes this composite quotation by citing Isaiah 40:3: “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make ready the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”¹⁸ The context of this passage is Isaiah 40:1-31, which speaks about God coming to his people (Isa 40:3, 9) in order to bring comfort (40:1), forgiveness (40:2), and the mighty leadership of a shepherd king (40:10-11). He will sit enthroned above all the inhabitants of the earth (40:22), pass judgment on earthly rulers (40:23-24), and establish perfect justice (40:27-28) to all those who wait upon him (40:29-31). In short, what Isaiah describes is “an exposition of the dynamic rule of God.”¹⁹ God will come and establish his rule over his people, passing judgment upon all those who oppose him.

Examining these contexts together yields the purpose for which Mark tied them together and placed them at the beginning of his description of the “gospel.” These texts speak about the arrival of one who will usher in a mighty act of victory that God will achieve for his people. Each context describes an emissary sent by God to prepare his people for his decisive act to save and refine them. As Rikki Watts explains, “What these texts lead us to expect is Israel’s warrior-shepherd himself coming to effect the nation’s salvation.”²⁰ Vickers gives the intended force of the composite quotation when he explains that in the ministry of John the Baptist, “the long expected fulfillment of the OT promise of the eschatological rule and reign of God is breaking into history.” This happens according to this established Old Testament expectation that mighty deeds of God on behalf of his people are preceded by one who prepares the way for God to act.²¹

¹⁷Gundry, *Mark*, 35.

¹⁸This is a direct quotation of the LXX of Isa 40:3, with the exception that Mark changes “make our God’s paths straight” (my translation) in LXX to “make his paths straight.”

¹⁹Vickers, “Mark’s Good News,” 15.

²⁰Rikki Watts, “Mark,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 119.

²¹Vickers, “Mark’s Good News,” 15.

The ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus, the one he announces, is the fulfillment of Old Testament patterns and promises concerning God's commitment to deliver and rule over his people.

A Reflection on God's Work in History

The connection between the promises in these texts and their fulfillment in Jesus' ministry strengthen our faith. More than likely, Mark was writing his gospel for people who were not Jewish and were unfamiliar with Jewish practices, laws, and Scripture.²² One can assume this because multiple times throughout the gospel, Mark explains Jewish customs and practices to his audience as if he did not expect them to understand them. Yet Mark begins his description of Jesus and his ministry by making clear that Jesus is the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. Mark attributes the ministry of John and Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah, who wrote some seven hundred years before either of them were born. Mark is explaining that the gospel about Jesus, the good news about Jesus, is the fulfillment of promises made to Israel that have been awaiting fulfillment for seven hundred years.²³

Why begin there? Why write a gospel to people that you do not expect to be familiar with Judaism and tell them that the person you are about to introduce is the fulfillment of long-held Jewish hopes? Mark wants his readers to understand that the faith centered on Jesus is a faith rooted in history, a history that God has sovereignly directed to this point in time.²⁴ Jesus is not someone who appeared on the scene and

²²Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), xliii.

²³Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 33, points out that Jesus actually culminates promises that go back even further than this. He writes, "The dawn of the age of salvation in Jesus in the consummation of a purposeful history of revelation of God extending back to Israel's inception at the Exodus. From Sinai onward, and particularly in the prophets, God has been preparing for a new beginning in Jesus Christ."

²⁴Gal 4:4 says, "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son." Note also Eph 1:8-10, "In all wisdom and insight he made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his kind intention which he purposed in him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth."

should be followed because he had a lot of good things to say, was a dynamic leader, and did some miraculous works. History is riddled with men making such claims. Rather, the story about Jesus begins hundreds and hundreds of years before he appeared. God had already been at work in the world, in the lives of a historic group of people, making promises that Jesus' life fulfills. The story about Jesus is one that is rooted in human history, in reality.

Rooting the story about Jesus in the prophetic voice of generations gone by calls the listeners in the present to look beyond their own lives, their own times, their own histories and realize that Jesus is someone more than just a great teacher. Jesus' appearance is the work of God, a God who has already been active in real human experience and working towards this culmination in the life and ministry of Jesus.²⁵

More than this, all of God's dealings in human history have been working toward this point.²⁶ God has been preparing his people for Jesus' arrival.²⁷ One can look into the Old Testament, this history of God's dealings with the Jewish people and see remarkable predictions about what would take place in Jesus' life: his family lineage, in what town he would be born, how he would be received by his people, events that would take place in his life, how he would die, and that he would live again after he died. All of these facts were talked about and anticipated in the Old Testament.

²⁵Dennis Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 118. He writes, "Of course, human ingenuity can draw all sorts of analogies between individuals and events at different points in history, but the New Testament writers claim more than this. They are not simply saying, 'I see a similarity between the exodus and Christian salvation, don't you?' They are saying, 'God planned and carried out the exodus not only to effect rescue for ancient Israel but also to portray for his people *in real history* the significance of the comprehensive liberation that his Messiah would later achieve.' They are saying, 'What happened to Abraham, to Moses, to David, to Jonah and the prophets happened as it did because God had designed it to be a limited but true reflection (Hebrews calls it a 'shadow') of the future experience and redemptive work of Jesus Christ [emphasis original].'"

²⁶See Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*.

²⁷See Alexander, *The Servant King*, for an excellent treatment of this point.

This is something one must consider about the founding figures from other religions outside of Christianity. Who was looking for them? Who expected them to appear? Who was waiting for Mohammed? Is there any evidence from other recognized Scripture that he was going to come, where he would be born, or what events would take place in his life? What prophecy or historical event ever anticipated Joseph Smith? What details were given about their lives in advance that one could check against history? What ancient proof is there for the life and teachings of Buddha? L. Ron Hubbard? One cannot ignore the detail and prominence of words and events that spanned hundreds of years that were all fulfilled in Jesus Christ. What other religion can boast such evidence?

What about those who follow no religion at all? Perhaps a person trusts that their own conscience and intuition are enough to guide them into truth. What rooting and grounding do they have for the way they live their life? What gives them certainty that the values they hold transcend the limitations of their own mind, culture, and place in history? What confidence do they have that they have the ability to determine what is absolutely true for all of humanity across all the different dimensions that divide us? One must confess that even such seemingly objective things as reason and science are not able to give definitive answers to all of life's questions.²⁸ How then can one also determine with certainty that no realities exist outside of the realm of their own sense observation?

Christianity is rooted in history, in fact, in multiple cultures spanning thousands of years, in God's real actions in history. Christ was promised beforehand and he arrived as the fulfillment of promise.²⁹ The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ

²⁸Pascal offers a compelling critique of the objectivity of reason in Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. by A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1980).

²⁹Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 28. He writes, "Jesus is not an afterthought of God, as though an earlier plan of salvation had gone awry. Rather, Jesus stands in continuity with the work of God in Israel, the fulfiller of the law and the prophets. The introductory tapestry of OT quotations not only links the person and ministry of Jesus inseparably with the preceding revelation of God in the OT, but it makes the person and ministry of Jesus nonunderstandable apart from it. From a Christian theological perspective, this unites the NT uniquely and inseparably to the OT. The gospel is understandable only as the completion of something that God began in the history of Israel."

is the definitive act of God by which he accomplishes deliverance and salvation for his people. This has been set forth by real events and real prophecies in the lives of real people in real history. The roots of Christianity are deep and therefore can support the weight of casting one's life upon its truth.

Jesus Alone Grants Salvation

In verses 4-8, Mark describes the ministry of this forerunner that proclaims and prepares the way for God's mighty acts of salvation. John the Baptist arrives on the scene as the one who prepares the way before Jesus, and he appears proclaiming a preparatory message. The main thrust of John's message is preparing God's people to meet a person. John does not come proclaiming a religion to practice but a person to receive.³⁰ Mark describes three things about John's message.

A Message of Repentance

John appears, as the quotation from Isaiah indicates, preaching in the wilderness.³¹ Mark makes it clear that he identifies John with the Old Testament prophet Elijah.³² The verse quoted from Malachi 3:1 that appears in Mark 1:2 speaks about a messenger that God will send ahead of himself and this figure is later identified in Malachi 4:5 as the prophet Elijah. This figure in the book of Malachi will come and work repentance in the hearts of the people. Malachi's messenger is associated with

³⁰Stein, *Mark*, 44. He says, "The importance of John for Mark does not lie in what he did in the history of first-century Judaism but that he points to Jesus and sheds light on who he is. Mark starts his Gospel with the story of John because he proclaimed the Coming One to whom the prophets pointed." So too Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 29: "Mark restricts his portrait of John to a single motif, depicting John as the fulfiller of Elijah's climactic role as the forerunner of 'one more powerful' (1:7), whose sandals he is unworthy to untie."

³¹James Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 40. Brooks gives the significance of the wilderness, or desert, theme as its importance to connecting the ministry of Jesus with the appearance of God himself: "The 'desert' is a major theme in the introduction (vv. 3, 4, 12, 13). In the Bible it is more than a geographical place; it is the place where God meets, reveals himself to, tests, and saves his people." Contra Stein, *Mark*, 45.

³²Brooks, *Mark*, 40. So too Stein, *Mark*, 47, and Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 32.

Elijah and will primarily have a mission focused on calling God's people to repentance. The Elijah predicted in Malachi and the nature of his ministry fits with Mark's description of John's ministry.

Furthermore, John is described as wearing garments of camel's hair and a leather belt, a description that matches the one given to Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8. Elijah appeared at a point in Israel's history when idolatry and unfaithfulness had reached an all time high. His ministry was a gracious gift sent by God to restore the hearts of the people to the covenant. This is the fundamental purpose in Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel—to call Israel's heart away from idolatry and back to their covenant God through a display of Yahweh's supremacy.³³

Thus John appeared to preach a message of repentance, calling the hearts of the people back to God. If people want a relationship with God, if they want to receive Jesus, they cannot stay the way that they are. Their heart must turn. There must be repentance. They cannot keep their old way of life before they knew God and enter into covenant with God at the same time. God's acts of deliverance do not mean that his people have no role to play in participating in that deliverance. They must respond to the news of God's work on their behalf with repentance. God's kingdom calls for repentance and a reorientation of one's life.

A Message of Forgiveness

John's message of repentance also had a specific end. He preached a message of repentance that resulted in the forgiveness of sins. His message was not just a message about repentance—it was a message about assurance. There is a promise attached to the repentance. As sins were confessed and people were plunged into the water through baptism, the washing of the water was a picture of the guilt of sin being washed away.³⁴

³³Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 32.

³⁴Brooks, *Mark*, 40.

Any preparation to meet God has to come with the understanding that one cannot come into his presence without a recognition that they have sinned against him.³⁵ This recognition, however, is followed with the promise that if one admits their sin, confesses it, does not try to hide it or explain it but in humility admits it with a desire to be free from it, such a heart will be met with kindness and compassion and a promise from God himself that he will extend pardon to their sin.

One must understand this: God calls people to repent because he longs to be merciful to them, to extend forgiveness to them, to see sin removed and reconciliation enjoyed. Too often people make the mistake of believing that God calls them to repentance only because he is angry that they have sinned. But God calls people to repentance out of love, not wrath. God reveals to them their sinfulness and calls them away from it because his desire is to restore and redeem them. He calls on people to confess their sins so that in their confession and repentance they might have forgiveness. Isaiah 30:18 says, “Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion.” God says in Ezekiel 33:11, “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” Confession of sin brings about assurance of forgiveness—this is the message John proclaimed.

³⁵Stein, *Mark*, 44-45. Stein explains that the unique nature of John’s baptism is found in its function as preparation to meet God. He writes, “The uniqueness of John’s baptism does not lie in it being an initiatory rite. Almost every religion has some sort of an initiation rite. Nor does its uniqueness lie in its form: immersion in water. It does not lie in its being administered by someone else (cf. 1:5). In Mark’s understanding, the uniqueness of John’s baptism did not lie in the fact that, accompanied by repentance, it resulted in the forgiveness of sins. Its uniqueness was seen in its purpose—to ‘prepare the way of the Lord.’ John’s ministry was not simply a revival movement in Israel turning people back to God with forgiveness as its goal. Rather, it was to prepare an eschatological community for the Coming One and the arrival of the kingdom of God.”

A Message Pointing to a Person

If John's ministry stopped here, his ministry would be no different than many other calls to repentance and assurance in the Old Testament. Biblical history was riddled with movements that began by the passionate preaching of God-anointed speakers. The pattern is repeated multiple times: God's people sin, he sends a preacher or prophet to call the people to repentance, they repent, and God receives and restores them. The Old Testament tells of such ministries in the life of Moses, Gideon, Elijah, Jonah, Ezra, Nehemiah, and several other judges, kings, and prophets.

All of these preached in a time of great sin and rebellion, saw repentance, and God's grace was poured out, but John's ministry is not primarily concerned with what he is doing. His ministry is pointing to someone else, someone greater than he is.³⁶ John could call people to repentance, confession, and a commitment to new life that resulted in forgiveness. But revivals that consist only in this have no ability to last. People need more than just a call to repentance, more than just an outward call. John, realizing his function, points to one stronger than he is, with a better ministry than he had, which leads to the third and most important aspect of John's message.

John says in verse 7, "After me will come one more powerful than I" (cf. Matt 3:11). John explains that the difference between his ministry and that of Jesus is that John baptizes "with water" but Jesus will baptize "with the Holy Spirit."³⁷

Ezekiel 36:25-28 explains what would accompany the presence of the Holy Spirit:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be

³⁶Stein, *Mark*, 44.

³⁷Brooks, *Mark*, 41, shows how this concept of baptism in the Spirit is linked to Old Testament promises. He lists Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 11:19; 36:26-27; 37:14; Joel 2:28-29 as texts fulfilled in this aspect of Jesus' ministry.

careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.

The coming of the Holy Spirit would bring with it a ministry that would change the hearts of mankind. There are many today who aspire to promote the right way to live. Some of them even use wisdom gained from God's revelation. There is not a person alive, however, who is able to grant a new heart or to impart a new spirit into another person. No one is able to take out the nature of someone's current heart and put a different one in its place. No mere person, no matter how dynamic their ability to speak and connect with people, has the ability to put a divine Spirit into another person and move them towards obedience.³⁸

How many parents have yearned for the ability to reach into the heart of their children and turn it towards wisdom? How many pastors have sat in counseling rooms with estranged couples and longed to reach inside an adulterous husband's heart and cause him to stop his sinfulness? How many substance abuse counselors have desired the ability to turn an addict's heart to the steps necessary to achieve sobriety? All the words spoken by every person throughout time cannot add up to give new birth and life to a dead heart.

However, John announces that Jesus is coming with the power of the Spirit and, with it, the power to change a person from the inside with supernatural ability. Jesus would not just preach change—he would *accomplish* it through baptizing people with the Holy Spirit. The consistent witness of the Old Testament is that the greatest human predicament is the heart's deceitfulness and love of wickedness. No true and lasting peace can be had with God while man lives with a natural human heart. Yet God had promised in Ezekiel 36 that he was going to reach in and fix the problem from the source.

³⁸Brooks, *Mark*, 41. Brooks explains that Mark goes on to say very little about the ministry of the Spirit in the rest of his narrative which leads the readers to conclude that this baptism in the Spirit happens after the close of Mark's narrative. Thus the reference here to baptism in the Spirit intends to identify Jesus as the fulfillment of specific Old Testament texts, not clarifying a part of Jesus' ministry that Mark intends to narrate.

Jesus' ministry would bring to fulfillment God's promises to his people to fix their constant rebellion and wandering by changing them from the inside.

So one should listen to Jesus because he alone can bring them salvation. John does not point to repentance but to a person.³⁹ He does not offer a different way of life—he offers one who can bring a new heart, a heart that loves God and in that love obeys him, bringing the blessings of obedience. One should listen to Jesus because he brings them something that no other person who has lived, is living, or ever will live can bring. He reaches down into human hearts and souls and fixes them where they are wounded most deeply.

Conclusion

God declares that he is acting to save and deliver his people and establish them in his kingdom through the coming of Jesus Christ. God had promised that he would again come and accomplish salvation for his people through a mighty act of deliverance. Such a coming, however, demands that God's people prepare themselves and so, consistent with Old Testament patterns and expectations, God sent forth a herald, John the Baptist, to preach repentance and restoration in light of God's imminent visitation.

Yet through John's preaching he shows that repentance and assurance of forgiveness must be connected to a person, Jesus. By narrating the ministry of John the Baptist, Mark is not telling his readers to get themselves right and God will be happy with them. He is telling them that God is coming with the power of the Spirit and will change them fundamentally from the inside, effecting the repentance and salvation they so desperately need. One's ability to truly change their life and have full assurance of the forgiveness that brings salvation and inclusion in the kingdom of God is tied up in this message about who Jesus is and what he is coming to do. Self-reform is not enough.

³⁹Brooks, *Mark*, 41.

Such a religion is not worthy to untie the thong of true Christianity. True religion centers not on one's actions but on another person, one long foretold, God himself come in the flesh. What a melodious sound is the gospel message about Jesus, bursting on ravished ears!

CHAPTER 3

MARK 1:9-13: THE KING ARRIVES

The Old Testament story, starting with Genesis 3, generates anticipation of a king who would crush God's adversaries, restoring rest to creation and reconciling humanity to its Creator.¹ When the Old Testament ends, however, this anticipation remains unfulfilled. Despite a faint glimmer of fulfillment when David and Solomon reigned as kings, the end of the Old Testament narrative finds God's people subjected to a foreign nation, their establishment in the land of promise is a mere shadow of what it had been during the reigns of David and Solomon, and their hearts are still far away from the Lord. Despite these bleak conditions, hope remains that God's judgment has not completely crushed Israel's future (Deut 30:1-5; Isa 2:1-4; Jer 31:27-40; Mic 4:1-5). The promises to Abraham, David, and those given through the prophets were not dead and still awaited a future fulfillment that centered on a kingly descendant of David who would restore Israel to glory and primacy among the nations.²

Jesus is the fulfillment of these Old Testament expectations. In 1:9-13, Mark demonstrates through multiple allusions to and echoes of Old Testament texts and promises that Jesus is God's answer to Israel's cry for salvation; he is the long awaited king and the one who would establish the kingdom of God. He will accomplish this through engaging Satan, a conflict that will wage throughout his ministry and culminate at the cross. In this battle he will be struck but ultimately will emerge victorious.

¹T. D. Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1998), 11-13.

²Stephen Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 47.

Surrounding Context of Mark 1:9-13

The opening chapter of Mark's gospel shows how Jesus is the promised deliverer foretold in the Old Testament who brings the saving activity of God. In the first eight verses of his gospel, Mark shows how John the Baptist comes with a message of repentance and the promise of the forgiveness of sins. John's ministry is popular and many come to repent, confess their sins, and seek restoration with God. His ministry, though, is preparatory and anticipatory of another figure more powerful than himself. Mark's description of John and his message make clear that he stands in the role of prophet, not kingly descendant and deliverer.

John's words make clear that he is pointing to another who would come to bring not only repentance but also a baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is an indicator that the one to whom he points would inaugurate the eschatological kingdom of God, characterized by the Spirit's outpouring (Joel 2:28-32). The eschatological kingdom of God is being ushered in through the one who comes after John the Baptist. The rest of the first chapter details Jesus' activity as this more powerful one, proclaiming and inaugurating the kingdom of God throughout the region of Galilee. He does this through preaching the gospel, casting out Satan's minions through exorcism, and healing the people.

In verses 9-13, Mark shows that Jesus is the kingly descendant promised by the Old Testament who will inaugurate the kingdom of God in the power of the Spirit by delivering God's people from their enemies. This is the identification of Jesus that Mark wants his readers to have as they encounter both Jesus' words and his actions in the rest of the gospel narrative.³

³Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 2006), 52. Hooker rightly asserts, "We are now in possession of the information which Mark considers we need to know in order to understand the rest of his narrative. The ministry of John has shown that we can expect the coming of the Lord; the voice from heaven has identified Jesus as the beloved Son of God; the temptation has meant the defeat of Satan. These themes will be worked out in the following chapters: but from now on they will not often be stated so clearly."

Divinely Commissioned for the Task

Jesus himself first appears in Mark's gospel at his baptism in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. The details surrounding Jesus' baptism in these verses confirm that Jesus is the divinely appointed deliverer promised in the Old Testament. Three supernatural events occur in conjunction with Jesus' baptism and each of these events are linked in both canonical and extra-biblical Jewish literature to an expectation of the arrival of God's eschatological kingdom.⁴ James Edwards explains,

Coming up from the water Jesus experienced three things that in Jewish tradition signified the inauguration of God's eschatological kingdom: the heavens were opened above him, the Spirit descended on him, and the heavenly voice spoke to him. These three events—rending of heaven, descent of the Spirit, voice of God—indicate the inauguration of God's eschatological kingdom. Their concurrence at the baptism indicates that Jesus is the inaugurator of that kingdom.⁵

Mark is showing his readers that Jesus has come as a fulfillment of God's promises and Jewish longing for God's saving intervention in the world. One must first understand who Jesus is before they can recognize the significance of his baptism. Each event—the rending of the heavens, the descent of the Spirit, and the voice of God speaking from heaven—points to Jesus as the one who will bring the inauguration of God's kingdom.⁶

⁴With respect to canonical references to these supernatural events, William Lane notes that both the outpouring of the Spirit and the voice from heaven “are to be associated with the new exodus in the wilderness prophesied by Isaiah,” and cites Isa 32:15; 44:3; 63:10-14. William Lane, *Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 56. Robert Guelich connects the rending of the heavens with the plea to “rend the heavens and come down” in Isa 64:1. Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 32. As to extrabiblical sources, several scholars connect the details here with passages from the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. Lane asserts that in the Testament of Levi 2:6, 5:1, and 18:6, along with II Baruch 22:2, “The rending of the heavens is associated with the hearing of a voice.” He also notes that in the Testament of Levi 18:6f. and Testament of Judah 24:2f the rending of the heavens is “associated with the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.” Lane, *Mark*, 55n56. So too C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, The Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 53.

⁵James Edwards, “The Baptism of Jesus According to the Gospel of Mark,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 1 (March 1991): 43.

⁶The point is that these events do not interpret what Jesus' baptism means; they indicate the identity and purpose of the one being baptized. As Robert Gundry says, these events do not “interpret Jesus' baptism; [they] interpret Jesus himself.” Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 46-47.

Heavens Tearing Open

In Isaiah 63:19, the people of Israel lament to God, “We have become like those over whom you have never ruled, like those who were not called by your name.” They had been conquered and dominated by their enemies and any trace of God’s activity on their behalf seems to have vanished in the dust of their ruined cities. Thus the cry issues forth in Isaiah 64:1, “Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at your presence—as fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at your presence!” They longed for God to rip open the skies and prove himself mighty for the cause of his people.⁷

Though a different Greek word is used in Mark 1:10 to describe the opening of the heavens than in the LXX, the rending of the heavens at Jesus’ baptism serves as God’s answer to this request.⁸ In Jesus’ day, the arrival of God’s kingdom does not appear to be any closer than it was at the end of the Old Testament narrative. God’s people are still ruled over by a foreign power, the king that Rome has appointed over Israel, Herod, is not of Davidic descent, and Israel does not own the land. The people are “like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt 9:36).

The call for help issued forth in Isaiah 64:1 is now being answered through Jesus. God is breaking his silence. As Rikki Watts says, “The rending of the heavens at Jesus’ baptism constitutes Yahweh’s long-awaited response. Isaiah’s final lament has been answered: God has come down to deliver his people, baring his mighty arm to do ‘awesome things that we did not expect.’”⁹ The kingdom of God is breaking in for the sake of God’s people in the person of Jesus.

⁷R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 77.

⁸Lane, *Mark*, 55.

⁹Rikki Watts, *Mark*, in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 122. So too James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing

Spirit Descending Like a Dove

After the heavens are ripped open, Mark reports that the Spirit of God descends into Jesus like a dove.¹⁰ This descent of the Spirit is the moment of empowerment for Jesus' ministry as the one who would usher in the kingdom of God.¹¹ As God's appointed answer for the salvation and deliverance of his people, Jesus is empowered for the task much like kings and leaders in the Old Testament. The Spirit often came upon individuals in the Old Testament as an empowerment for divinely appointed tasks.¹² Many of these Spirit-empowerments were for positions of leadership, such as the elders who assisted Moses as judges in the wilderness (Num 11:16-25). Others were for acts of deliverance, as when Samson was empowered to deliver Israel from the Philistines (Judg 15:14-20). David also received the Spirit of God in conjunction with his anointing to serve as Israel's king (1 Sam 16:12-13; cf. Ps 51:11). Isaiah prophesied that the kingly descendant who will usher in God's eschatological kingdom to bring deliverance to God's people will be anointed by the Spirit and empowered for his mission (Isa 11:1-5). Jesus is invested with power by the Spirit to enable him to bring in the kingdom of God.

Yet Mark says more than just that the Spirit came down upon Jesus. Mark describes the Spirit as descending *into* Jesus. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon

Company, 2002), 35. Robert Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 57, is not convinced Isa 63-64 is the correct background.

¹⁰There is a vast assortment of interpretations behind the description of the Spirit's descent towards Jesus being "as a dove." To cite a couple, William Lane writes, "The rabbis refer to the dove as a symbol of the community of Israel, and this association may have been in Mark's mind. At the moment of his baptism Jesus is the one true Israelite, in whom the election of God is concentrated. The descent of the Spirit 'as a dove' indicates that he is the unique representative of the new Israel created through the Spirit." Lane, *Mark*, 57. Robert Gundry suggests that the Spirit's descent as a dove merely points to its divinity, as he notes that the dove was seen in the Hellenistic world as a divine bird. Robert Gundry, *Mark*, 49. With such an array of interpretations, and no precedent clearly articulated in the text, perhaps it is best to agree with Guelich in not striving to see a symbolic meaning in this detail, remarking that it may simply be a detail remembered by an eye-witness. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 35.

¹¹Gundry, *Mark*, 48.

¹²Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 46.

people and empowered them for a particular task but he did not come *into* them in the sense that all of their actions were empowered by him. But in Jesus' case, the Spirit does not only come upon him, but *into* him, meaning that it is not just particular things that Jesus does that should be seen as empowered by God, but everything he does. Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida explain,

It seems reasonably clear that Mark does not say that the Spirit came *upon* Jesus at his baptism as the Spirit of God came upon Old Testament leaders: rather he says that the Spirit entered into and possessed Jesus, who henceforth acts with the authority and power of God, as God's Spirit-filled and Spirit-led Son."¹³

Jesus did not receive the Spirit on specific occasions for specific deeds, after which the Spirit left him. The Spirit did not rest upon him but came to reside *in* him. In other words, Jesus was empowered by the Spirit at all times, so that all of his actions and all of his words are divinely empowered.¹⁴ All of his words and deeds should be seen as divinely empowered events that either bring or explain the incoming kingdom of God.

The Voice from Heaven

After the Spirit descends upon Jesus out of the opened heavens, God speaks audibly from heaven, addressing the Son. The content of God's declaration gives the audience deeper understanding of how Jesus is going to accomplish God's salvation and bring in the eschatological kingdom. God's heavenly utterance is intentionally reminiscent of several Old Testament texts, investing the words God utters with

¹³Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1961), 29.

¹⁴Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 36. He writes, "The NIV renders the phrase as 'the Spirit descending on him,' but the Greek intensifies the union of Jesus and the Spirit: 'the Spirit was descending *into* him,' indicating Jesus' complete filling and equipping for ministry by the Spirit." France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 78, says, "It is indeed possible that Mark's choice of this preposition was more theologically determined: just as other NT writers will speak of the Spirit 'dwelling in' believers, so he comes to Jesus not just as a temporary equipment for a specific task, but as a permanent presence in his life." France does note, however, that the range of meaning for "into" here "is sufficient to allow it to be seen here at little different from the *ἐπί* used in the synoptic parallels." He offers scholarly opinion on both sides. He concludes that the exact meaning of "into" should not be stressed and thus should be taken as describing the Spirit as descending "towards" or "upon" Jesus.

redemptive-historical significance. These words from heaven explain who Jesus is, forming the correct frame of reference for understanding what he came to do. As Edwards says, “It must first be communicated who Jesus is . . . before his [mission] will have any ultimate, salvific meaning.”¹⁵ The divine voice from heaven uses Old Testament allusions to explain both who Jesus is and how he will establish the kingdom of God. There are three main texts that provide the background for God’s words in verse 11.¹⁶

God first identifies Jesus with the kingly office. “You are my Son,” recalls verse 7 of Psalm 2, a psalm about the universal reign of God’s appointed king. By the first century, Psalm 2 was understood as a messianic text. Thus the application of the title “Son” to Jesus using the language of Psalm 2 identifies him as the Davidic son promised in 2 Samuel 7:14 who would reign as king over all the nations. As R.T. France says, “The voice from heaven thus hails Jesus in terms which echo the role of the conquering Messiah.”¹⁷

Second, Jesus is not only the “Son”; God identifies him as his “beloved” Son. This is most likely a reference to the narrative in Genesis 22 when Abraham is called to sacrifice his son Isaac.¹⁸ In Genesis 22:2, God calls Abraham to sacrifice his “beloved” son (Gen 22:2; God also refers to Isaac in this way in verse 12). The sacrifice that God asks Abraham to make is intensified in that what God is calling him to give up is his

¹⁵Edwards, “The Baptism of Jesus,” 53-54.

¹⁶Several scholars reject identifying particular texts with God’s declaration in v. 11. Guelich says that no text “adequately accounts for the statement as a whole.” Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 33. Hooker likewise believes that God’s words are to be seen in light of numerous other Old Testament passages but not any one or group of texts in particular. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 47. While I agree that many texts could lay behind God’s words here, this does not necessarily rule out that there were particular texts being referenced. Thus while the picture intended in the declaration could be filled out more extensively by reference to other texts, the specific texts that are explored here are most representative of those ideas.

¹⁷France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 80.

¹⁸Edwards, “The Baptism of Jesus,” 53.

“beloved” (“only” in NASB) son.¹⁹ By reporting that God calls Jesus his “beloved” son here in 1:11, Mark is referencing the Abraham and Isaac narrative.

This accomplishes two things. First, it describes Jesus’ unique relationship to the Father.²⁰ Though the NASB translates “beloved” as “only” son, it was not true that Isaac was Abraham’s only son, since Abraham had already fathered Ishmael years before. The title does not designate Isaac as his only son, but rather as the son of unique relationship to him.²¹ Isaac, not Ishmael or any of Abraham’s other sons (Gen 25:1-6) was the son through whom the promise of universal blessing was to flow. Just as Isaac was the unique descendant of Abraham for the purpose of universal blessing, so Jesus holds a unique position as God’s Son. Second, it introduces the motif of sacrifice that is prevalent in Genesis 22. Jesus is God’s Son, the king who will reign over all the nations of the earth, and he is also the unique, beloved Son who is called to be sacrificed according to the will of God. Calling Jesus the “beloved” Son intimates that his ministry will involve sacrifice.²² It is an early hint that Jesus would be the one who came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Finally, after identifying Jesus as his beloved son, the Father finishes his declaration by saying, “In you I am well-pleased.” This is an echo back to Isaiah 42:1 specifically and the suffering servant passages sprinkled throughout Isaiah in general.²³

¹⁹The LXX here uses the same word as Mark does in 1:11.

²⁰France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 82. Stein, *Mark*, 59, also drawing the connection between this text and Gen 22, says the term “beloved” here “functions much as ‘one and only.’”

²¹Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 38. He writes, “The divine proclamation expresses the steadfast love of the Father for the Son as well as their essential unity.”

²²France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 81, who notes the possibility of Jewish interpretation of the Isaac sacrifice narrative involving “the vicarious basis for Israel’s redemption.” He says that “some scholars believe that this . . . doctrine was picked up by NT writers to explain the purpose of the death of Jesus.” Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 38, says, “Other NT writers (Rom 4:24; 8:32; Heb 11:17-19) and early church fathers (*Barn* 7:3 onwards) also saw in the sacrifice of Isaac the prefigurement of the sacrifice of Jesus.” Note also the use of “beloved son” in Mark 12:6, a parable told by Jesus directly referencing his impending death.

²³France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 55. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 47, notes that no words used here in Mark 1:11 are present in the LXX of Isa 42:1. In this, Hooker claims that the connection between these words here and Isa 42 are “dubious” and “misleading.” However, Edwards’

Isaiah 42 speaks about God's servant who would come to "bring forth justice to the nations" (Isa 42:1) and "to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon and those who dwell in darkness from the prison" (Isa 42:7). Other "servant" passages in Isaiah include texts in Isaiah 49 and 53. Isaiah 49 shows that the servant is the one "in whom I will show my glory" (Isa 49:3) and who will not only lead Jacob but will also be "a light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa 49:6). Isaiah 53 shows that though the servant will be "high and lifted up and greatly exalted" (Isa 52:13), he will also be "despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3). He will be "cut off out of the land of the living" (Isa 53:8), will die and be assigned a grave (Isa 53:9), and will pour out himself to death and be "numbered with the transgressors" (Isa 53:12). The picture painted by these servant passages is one of a figure that will establish justice and salvation for all the nations but will do so in suffering and death.

Jeffrey Gibson summarizes the impact of the Old Testament references in God's utterance:

In light of these considerations we may conclude that, according to Mark, what the voice at Jesus' baptism declares is that Jesus is Israel's anointed king and God's messiah, charged with attaining victory over the forces of evil, the beloved, the one destined for death, and the servant who heals his people and brings justice to the nation through suffering. This being the case, then the mission predicated of Jesus by the voice is to establish God's sovereignty over the world through suffering and self-sacrifice, and death.²⁴

By calling Jesus the beloved Son in whom he is well-pleased, God is giving the audience a frame of reference through which to understand both who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish. Jesus is the one who is representative of God's saving action, bringing in his eschatological kingdom. He does so as the one who is the king who sits in unique

article cited above shows that such a connection is not only warranted, but likely.

²⁴Jeffrey Gibson, "Jesus' Wilderness Temptation According to Mark," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 53 (March 1994): 29.

relationship to God, who will bring about the justice of God's kingdom, and it is intimated that this will be accomplished through suffering and sacrifice.

The Effect of the Supernatural Signs

The three supernatural events that accompany Jesus' baptism make clear that God's kingdom comes to pass through a particular Savior who is designated by God for the task of bringing salvation to the people. They make clear that salvation is something that God accomplishes for us through Jesus. It is not something that men can earn. Many trust that their own goodness and deeds will make them a part of God's kingdom. These verses urge us to see that God brings salvation through a Savior, through his appointed king, through his unique Son, through the one who comes to suffer and die. People must stop trusting that they can make their way into God's kingdom through their own effort. They must start trusting the one appointed for them by God to be their savior.

The supernatural events that occur at Jesus' baptism signal that he is God's divinely appointed answer for his people's cry for salvation. He is the king who will rule all the nations and will bring justice and peace to the ends of the earth through his suffering and death.²⁵ This understanding of the supernatural signs creates the backdrop for understanding the event—Jesus' baptism—that they accompany.

Jesus' Baptism: Identifying with Sinners and Bearing Wrath

Jesus' baptism is the catalyst for the supernatural events that identify him as the one divinely appointed to bring in God's eschatological kingdom. The baptism is a vital part of the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospels. All three of the synoptic Gospels narrate the event and John references it (John 1:33). Jesus' baptism continued to hold

²⁵France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 79. He writes, "Here in the prologue there is open declaration." These signs are clear indications concerning who Jesus is and what he came to do. While secrecy, misunderstanding, unbelief, and rejection characterize most responses to Jesus throughout the narrative, Mark is open and plain concerning who Jesus is here in the prologue.

high significance in the early church's understanding of the story of Jesus, evidenced by it being a key element of Peter's brief summary of the gospel to Cornelius in Acts 10:38.²⁶ Jesus' baptism was considered to be the commencement of his task to bring in the kingdom of God with power and as such provides important details in establishing how that task would be accomplished.

Two main elements highlight the significance of Jesus' baptism. First, by submitting to baptism, Jesus submits to bearing the wrath of God for sin. By participating in John's baptism, Jesus agrees with its underlying premise; namely, that Israel has indeed sinned and needs repentance and forgiveness if they are to be right with God. But by submitting to the baptism himself, he "signifies that his mission will be to endure the judgment of God."²⁷ Being plunged into water is a common biblical theme associated with experiencing the wrath of God.²⁸ As Jesus was plunged beneath the waters at his baptism, he foreshadows his task of bearing the weight of God's wrath upon sin.

Second, Jesus' identification with sinners is related to the idea of him bearing the wrath of God. Lane notes that the similarities between how Jesus is described in verse 9 and how the crowds are described in verse 5 press home this identification. The similarities in the sentences that describe how both the crowds and Jesus are baptized are striking. Both verses describe how the crowds and Jesus (1) came from a particular place ("the country of Judea . . . and . . . Jerusalem" for the crowds and "Nazareth in Galilee"

²⁶Kilian McDonnell, "Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan," *Theological Studies* 56, no. 2 (June 1995): 209. McDonnell goes on to show how Jesus' baptism was an important element in early church creeds but eventually fell out of inclusion in later creeds because theologians wanted to distance themselves from adoptionism, which claimed that Jesus became the Son of God at his baptism.

²⁷Lane, *Mark*, 54.

²⁸Cf. Gen 6:17; Exod 14:28; Job 22:11; Ps 106:11; Isa 28:2, 17; Jer 47:2; 51:55; Ezek 26:19; Hos 5:10.

for Jesus) (2) to be baptized (3) by John (4) in the Jordan River.²⁹ Cranfield sums up the significance of these similarities when he says,

Jesus' submission to John's baptism of repentance was his mature self-dedication to his mission of self-identification with sinners which in due course would involve the cross. In his baptism he became for men's sake and in their place 'the one great Sinner who repents'—to use Barth's daring phrase.³⁰

As the reader of Mark's gospel progresses through the rest of the narrative, it becomes apparent that his baptism is a picture of his future death.³¹ In 10:38, Jesus will cryptically refer to his impending crucifixion as "the baptism with which I am baptized." From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus knew that the end task would be to die as the substitute for sinners who would bear the wrath of God.

Engaging the Enemy of the Kingdom

But Jesus' task was not only about absorbing God's wrath by his identification with sinners. Genesis 3, the beginning of the biblical story, makes known that the restoration of God's kingdom on the earth must involve the defeat of the enemy of God and his people. The curse on creation and mankind comes through the rebellion incited by the serpent, Satan. God promises an on-going battle between those who belong to the serpent and those who belong to the people of promise, until a descendant would come who would deal a crushing, victorious blow (Gen 3:15). The serpent's head must be crushed if true reconciliation is to take place. If Jesus' main task is to inaugurate the eschatological kingdom of God, the main enemy to his kingdom must be crushed.

Immediately following Jesus' appointment to the task of ushering in God's eschatological kingdom at his baptism is his subsequent ordeal with Satan in the wilderness. As Lane explains, "Jesus' expulsion into the desert is the necessary

²⁹Lane, *Mark*, 54. Contra Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 44.

³⁰Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 52.

³¹Ibid.

consequence of his baptism; it is the same Spirit who descended upon Jesus at his baptism who now forces him to penetrate more deeply into the wilderness.”³² The same Spirit that empowers Jesus for his divinely appointed task now thrusts him out into the wilderness where he engages in a forty-day struggle with Satan.

Jesus’ struggle with Satan in the wilderness for forty days identifies him with Israel. This stresses the aforementioned principle of Jesus’ identification with God’s people.³³ Intervals of time marked by forty constantly occur in Israel’s history. Forty is a significant number that is related to both the prominent leaders within Israel, such as Moses (Exod 24:18) and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:8), and the nation itself, which spent forty years wandering in the wilderness (Deut 1:3). Jesus spending forty days in the wilderness further indicates that he is to be identified with the people for whom he has come to bring salvation.³⁴

The other details of Jesus’ stay in the wilderness serve to highlight the austerity of the account. Jesus is said to be out in the wilderness “with the wild beasts” (1:13). This clause stresses the dangerous nature of Jesus’ wilderness experience. As Lane says, “Mark’s reference to the wild beasts in Ch. 1:13 serves to stress the character of the wilderness. Jesus confronts the horror, the loneliness and the danger with which the wilderness is fraught when he meets the wild beasts.”³⁵ The mention of the wild beasts is

³²Lane, *Mark*, 59.

³³Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 40.

³⁴Lane thinks that the forty days identifies him with significant leaders in Israel’s history and not with the nation in general. He says, “The reference to the forty days recalls Moses’ stay on Mount Sinai and Elijah’s wandering through the wilderness to Mount Horeb. In their case the time of the forty days concentrates into one crucial period the innermost quality of their mission. Moses and Elijah are men of the wilderness, both prior to this period as well as after it. There is evidence that the same perspective is true of Jesus in Mark. The forty days do not describe a period whose significance is exhausted once Jesus begins his public ministry but sound the dominant note of his entire ministry.” In other words, Lane believes that Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness being tempted by Satan is the “innermost quality” of his mission. Hereafter, Jesus will be doing battle with Satan. Lane, *Mark*, 60. Hooker thinks that the reference to forty days is just a Hebrew round number meaning a long time and is not reminiscent of any particular OT text. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 50. I find this opinion incredible in light of the deep Old Testament background evident throughout this entire narrative.

³⁵Lane, *Mark*, 61.

“part of the menacing wilderness” and shows that Jesus undergoes the temptation on hostile territory.³⁶

Mark also mentions that the angels were there ministering to Jesus. This detail points both to the danger present in the wilderness and Jesus’ status as God’s chosen representative. Jesus receiving the angel’s ministry reiterates that the wilderness is a place of loneliness and danger where provision is scarce. It also hearkens back to the “motif of the angel who guides and helps Israel through the wilderness” and the story of Elijah, “where an angel supplies nourishment for Elijah in the barren wilderness.”³⁷

Thus the Spirit impels Jesus out into the wilderness to do battle with Satan in a hostile environment. As the king who introduces the eschatological kingdom of God, Jesus must engage the main enemy of that kingdom. Right at the forefront of Jesus’ ministry, the cosmic battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan has been engaged. Mark, however, does not record the outcome of this time of testing and temptation.³⁸ For Mark, the story of how Jesus overcomes and conquers Satan is not the way in which he resisted his particular temptations at this point and time.³⁹ Jesus ultimately is victorious over Satan through his suffering, death, and resurrection. The record of Satan’s defeat ultimately awaits the completion of the Gospel narrative. It is through his death on the cross that Jesus rendered “powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14).

³⁶John Paul Heil, “Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (January 2006): 63-64.

³⁷Lane, *Mark*, 61-62.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 60-61.

³⁹Other scholars take a different view on what is being communicated in the temptation narrative. Gundry believes that the details of Jesus’ temptation underscore how important he is. Jesus is tempted by no one less than Satan himself, wild beasts are there without harmful consequence because of his might as the Son of God, and his helpers are no mere mortals but angelic beings. Gundry, *Mark*, 59. Gibson thinks that Mark does intend us to see a successful conclusion to the temptation narrative. He writes, “Mark’s report that after—and as a result of—being tempted, Jesus had beasts and angels subjugating themselves to him is both a declaration by Mark that Jesus’ wilderness temptation had an outcome and the disclosing of his view concerning what that outcome was.” Gibson, “Jesus’ Wilderness Temptation According to Mark,” 32.

Contemporary Application

Mark has presented his readers with a picture of who Jesus was and what his mission would be. Jesus is God's provision for salvation, a salvation he will accomplish by bearing the wrath for sin and by engaging the enemy of God's kingdom. How should people then live in light of these truths?

First, Christians must never become soft or ambivalent towards the notion of sin. The picture Mark gives is that Jesus' ministry in the world involves bearing the weight of God's wrath against sin. This is often an unpopular part of the Christian message. Jesus' willingness to identify with John's baptism shows that sin, judgment, and wrath are a part of the good news of the kingdom of God. Many like to believe that people are basically good and, thus, there is no need for anything to be done for them with respect to their entrance into God's kingdom. While most would not claim to be actually sinless, many reject the notion that something has to be done about the sins they commit. God's judgment, many believe, is reserved only for few, the most notorious sinners—rapists, murderers, and child molesters. They believe that the way to heaven is broad and many find it while the way to hell is narrow and few will find it.⁴⁰ They want to believe that as long as their good outweighs the bad, nothing has to be done on their behalf.

Jesus' submission to baptism here underscores the reality that sin requires consequences. Sin brings wrath and judgment. As Paul put it, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 3:23). Wrath and judgment has to be dealt with if one is to experience true washing away of their sins. If one does away with the notion of sin, or if they reserve the necessity of punishment only for the notorious sinners (a group with which they would seldom identify), then Jesus' ministry is obsolete. Mark shows us that Jesus is the one who must undergo the weight of God's wrath for all people. God's answer to the cry for

⁴⁰I am indebted to John Gonzalez, a member in the church where I serve, for this particular wording.

salvation is to send a substitute to bear the weight of guilt. But if people reject him, they will bear the weight of judgment and wrath themselves.

Second, one must remember that the foe that must be vanquished for the victory of the kingdom of God is no mere mortal enemy. The kingdom of God does not do battle merely against physical armies as if the way to victory was simply to amass a more impressive display of human strength. The enemy to be vanquished is no less than Satan, “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4). He is a being of great power,⁴¹ and cannot be defeated by human means (2 Cor 10:3-4).⁴² People will not feel the need to cling to Jesus as Savior-King without a full appreciation of the enemy that they face.

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote, “It increasingly seems to me that the essence of the error which most people seem to make, even in the history of this twentieth century to which we belong, is that they fail to consider the biblical doctrine of the devil and his angels.”⁴³ People underestimate their enemy and so undervalue the Savior. Satan has immense power in this world (2 Cor 4:4), is deceptive (2 Cor 11:14), and holds the power of death (Heb 2:14). If people would be free of him and have victory over him (Rom 16:20), they must do so through Jesus, who engaged and ultimately triumphed over him through his death and resurrection. As Martin Luther gloriously penned, “Did we in our own strength confide/Our striving would be losing/Were not the right Man on our side/the Man of God’s own choosing/Dost ask who that may be?/Christ Jesus, it is he/Lord Sabaoth his name/And age to age the same/And he must win the battle!”

⁴¹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 413.

⁴²Charles Hodge wrote, concerning Satan and the evil spirits in his kingdom, “As to the power and agency of these evil spirits, they are represented as being exceedingly numerous, as everywhere efficient, as having access to our world, and as operating in nature and in the minds of men. . . . [Satan’s] power is very great. Men are said to be led captive by him; evil spirits are said to work in the hearts of the disobedient. Christians are warned against their devices, and called upon to resist them, not in their own strength, but in the strength of the Lord and armed with the whole panoply of God.” Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hedrickson, 2011), 1:644.

⁴³Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 115.

Conclusion

Mark shows his readers that Jesus is the divinely appointed king who will usher in God's eschatological kingdom through the power of the Spirit. The way through which this kingdom will ultimately be established is the pathway of suffering and sacrifice. Jesus will suffer and die as he bears the wrath of God as the substitute for sinners. This death will also serve as the act by which the enemy of God's kingdom, Satan, will be engaged and defeated. Jesus will triumph over the serpent and bring God's people safely into the kingdom through his suffering and death.

CHAPTER 4

MARK 1:14-15: THE KINGDOM PROCLAMATION

The 2010 Academy Award-winning movie *The King's Speech* chronicles the struggle of Prince Albert, the Duke of York, to overcome a stutter that plagued him from childhood. After the death of his father and the abdication of the throne by his older brother, Prince Albert ascends to the throne of England just as it becomes apparent that England will have to declare war upon Adolf Hitler and his Nazi regime in Germany. His ability to speak clearly and confidently is now a matter of national importance; he must deliver a speech to declare war upon Germany to the population. An announcement riddled with stuttered and faltering speech would communicate weakness in a time when strength was needed. The king's voice needed to provide the certainty and decisiveness the occasion required.

In the previous verses of Mark's gospel, Mark has made clear that Jesus is God's promised Davidic ruler, the king through which the saving reign of God would come. As he brings the kingdom near, Jesus also engages the kingdom of Satan in a cosmic struggle. Mark 1:14-15 then shows that this king comes to carry out these momentous tasks as one who proclaims a message.¹

Surrounding Context of Mark 1:14-15

The first thirteen verses of Mark's gospel have used Old Testament quotations and allusions to help the reader understand the "gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). This gospel is the good news that the salvation God promised his people in the Old

¹R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 89-90.

Testament has arrived in the person of Jesus. Jesus is God's appointed king who will usher in God's salvation, bring the promised outpouring of God's Spirit, and engage the kingdom of Satan in conflict. These first thirteen verses communicate Mark's major themes and serve as a prologue for the gospel.²

Mark 1:14 starts a new section of Mark's narrative.³ This section will run to 3:6 and composes the first major unit of the gospel.⁴ In this first section, Mark gives a snapshot of Jesus' ministry as a whole. Here one sees Jesus calling disciples, teaching with authority, casting out evil spirits, healing diseases, and encountering opposition, which is a basic summary of Jesus' activity during his ministry.⁵ The implications given by Old Testament allusions and quotations in the prologue are fleshed out by the action of Jesus' ministry.

This section also introduces Galilee as the setting for the first half of the gospel. The first half of the gospel runs from 1:14 to 8:21 and takes place primarily in the north, within Galilee proper. The second half that begins in 8:22 marks Jesus' intention to go to Jerusalem, ending in his only visit there recorded in Mark's gospel where the events of Jesus' Passion and the climax of the gospel unfold.⁶ Mark's intention in 1:14-8:21 is, as R. T. France says, "to lead us to understand how the messianic mission

²France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 88-89.

³Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary of His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 62.

⁴William Lane, *Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 62. This section begins with a summary statement about Jesus' ministry (1:14-15) and is followed by a paragraph about Jesus' disciples (1:16-20). Similarly, the next section that commences in 3:7 also begins with a summary statement of ministry (3:7-12) followed by a paragraph about Jesus' disciples (3:13-20). This makes it clear that 1:14-3:6 is to be seen as a unit. Robert Stein also mentions that Mark will often use a summary statement like those in 1:14-15 to begin new sections in the gospel. Robert Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 69.

⁵Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Continuum, 2006), 52. She notes that Mark may not intend for this first section to be a snapshot of Jesus' ministry but that it effectively works in this way.

⁶France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 88.

of the Son of God, set out in theological perspective in the prologue, was worked out in practice among the inhabitants of the villages and smaller towns of Galilee.”⁷

At the beginning of his account of Jesus’ ministry, Mark gives a summary of the content of Jesus’ teaching. Teaching is the dominant activity of Jesus’ ministry in this first section of the gospel and the main thrust of that teaching is summarized at the outset.⁸ Before Mark gives that content, however, he places Jesus’ ministry within the context of John’s arrest. The arrival of God’s kingdom does not ensure the immediate physical safety of its members, as Mark’s account of the life of both John and Jesus will make clear.

The Suffering of the Kingdom

Faithfulness to the kingdom of God leads to suffering (2 Tim 3:12).

Throughout Mark’s gospel John’s ministry is placed in reference to Jesus where the surrounding context involves suffering (1:14-15; 6:7-30; 9:9-13). Here in verse 14, before Mark records the main content of Jesus’ preaching ministry, he puts that preaching against the backdrop of John’s arrest. It is only after John is “handed over” that Jesus begins his public ministry in Galilee.⁹ Though the details of John’s arrest and his ultimate fate are not recalled until later in the gospel (6:14-29), Mark puts forward the suffering of John, the kingdom herald, as the opening event of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus has come to announce the “good news” of God’s kingdom that has arrived and yet it takes

⁷France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 89. Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Mark 1:14-15,” *Review and Expositor* 88, no. 4 (1991): 427, argues that Galilee is significant in that it was looked down upon by most Jews and yet this is where Jesus began his ministry. He writes, “It is from among the poor and despised that the message comes of the universal love that the God of Jesus Christ has for mankind.”

⁸See James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 177. He writes, “Jesus is popularly conceived of as undertaking a ministry of ‘presence’ or of compassion and healing. These were indeed important elements of his ministry, but they do not identify the dominant purpose of his ministry, which, according to Mark, was *teaching* [emphasis original].”

⁹This is the chronology in Mark’s gospel. How Mark’s chronology fits with that of the other gospel writers, particularly John, will be discussed below.

place amidst the backdrop of John's arrest.¹⁰ John's suffering, which stands in a long line of the suffering of God's prophets throughout Old Testament history (2 Chron 36:15-16; cf. Acts 7:52), foreshadows that Jesus himself will be "handed over" later in the gospel (14:10-11, 17-21, 43-50).¹¹ The suffering of the prophets prefigures and finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus' suffering.¹² As Gustavo Gutiérrez points out, "The evangelist is giving notice in advance of the price to be paid for a mission that has hardly begun."¹³

The Chronology of John and Jesus' Ministries

Before examining the relationship between John's arrest and Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom in greater detail, Mark's chronology of events presented here needs to be related to the chronology of other gospel writers. Mark clearly states that Jesus came into Galilee to proclaim the kingdom only after John had been taken into custody. This seems to contradict John 3:22-23, that Jesus and John ministered simultaneously.¹⁴ C. K. Barrett notes, however, that the events John portrays in the opening four chapters of his gospel "are to be thought of as having taken place before the point at which Mark begins his account of the ministry with Jesus' public appearance in Galilee."¹⁵ John's first four chapters deal primarily with a ministry in Judea that is left

¹⁰Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 44-45.

¹¹Ibid. See also James Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing Company, 1991), 46. So too Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 66.

¹²I owe this insight to Brian Vickers.

¹³Gutiérrez, "Mark 1:14-15," 427.

¹⁴Richard Bauckham, "John for Readers of Mark," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 147-72, for a discussion of this and other issues concerning the chronology between Mark and John's gospels.

¹⁵C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978), 220-21.

unrecorded by the Synoptic writers. John's verses do not contradict Mark because he is narrating a time prior to the events Mark is describing.¹⁶

A second point defending Mark's order of events is that Mark's point is more theological than chronological.¹⁷ John, being the forerunner of the Messiah, and his ministry theologically preceded Jesus' and it was only after John's ministry as herald of the coming king concluded that Jesus came into full prominence.¹⁸ John had predicted that a stronger one would follow him, so it is natural to present the beginning of Jesus' ministry in light of the conclusion of John's.¹⁹ As Morna Hooker writes, "The significance of Mark's words lies rather in his belief that the work of the forerunner is now complete, and the work of Jesus can therefore begin."²⁰

John's Fate Foreshadows Jesus' Suffering

James Edwards notes that John is the fulfillment of Scripture, the pre-cursor for the Messiah, and has his ministry divinely sanctioned by the events of Jesus' baptism. Yet he is thrown in jail where he will ultimately be killed (Mark 6:14-29).²¹ By portraying Jesus' ministry in light of John being arrested, Mark signals that faithfulness to the kingdom leads to suffering. The verb used here to describe John being "handed over" (*paradidōmi*) is used twenty times in Mark's gospel. With the exception of two

¹⁶Lane, *Mark*, 63, also makes the point that Jesus' prominence in Galilee must have come after John was already off the scene. He writes, "Ch. 6:14 shows conclusively, however, that the activities of Jesus and John were both chronologically and spatially separated. Those who judged that Jesus is John raised from the dead could not have seen the two men working together, or known of Jesus' baptism by John. The public activity which brought Jesus to the attention of the people could only have begun after John had been removed from the scene through his arrest."

¹⁷Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 42.

¹⁸Stein, *Mark*, 70-71.

¹⁹Gundry, *Mark*, 63.

²⁰Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 53. So too France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 90.

²¹Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 44-45.

occurrences that appear in Jesus' teaching (speaking of a crop "putting forth" its yield in 4:29 and the "handing down" of tradition in 7:13), all other eighteen occurrences refer to suffering for the kingdom of God.

The overwhelming majority of the uses of *paradidōmi* throughout the gospel speak specifically about Jesus being handed over to those who sought his life. The word is used to describe how Jesus is betrayed by Judas (3:19; 14:10-11), handed over to an arresting mob (14:43-46), delivered to Pilate (15:1), and ultimately put forward for crucifixion (15:15). John's being handed over at the beginning of Jesus' ministry foreshadows what will ultimately happen to Jesus himself.²² Jesus explicitly connects his own suffering to John's fate in 9:12-13: "And yet how is it written of the Son of Man that he will suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah [a reference to John, Matthew 7:10-13] has indeed come, and they did to him whatever they wished, just as it is written of him."²³ What has happened to John foreshadows what will happen to Jesus.²⁴

John's Fate Foreshadows the Suffering of Jesus' Disciples

It should not be overlooked, however, that *paradidōmi* also appears in an important text regarding Jesus' disciples. In the Olivet discourse in chapter 13, Jesus twice mentions that the disciples themselves would be "handed over" in the course of being witnesses for the kingdom. They will be delivered over to the courts, which

²²Lane, *Mark*, 63.

²³France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 90.

²⁴There is some debate in the literature as to whether the passive forms of *paradidōmi* that occur in the texts concerning John and Jesus should be seen as divine passives. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 54, says a divine passive could be implied here. So too C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentaries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 62. This is contra Gundry, *Mark*, 63, who rejects the notion. He sees it only as referring to the fact that what happened to them happened at the hands of other men.

implies that they will be arrested as John was (13:9) and betrayed by their closest relationships, reflecting Jesus' own betrayal by one from his inner circle (13:12). John's arrest not only foreshadows Jesus' fate at the end of the gospel but also the fate of all of those who stand as heralds of God's kingdom. As R. T. France says, "There is a basic conflict of interests, even of ideologies, between the kingdom of God and the norms of human society."²⁵ The kingdom comes and calls on men to repent (Mark 1:15; 6:12) and thus they will often meet with rejection and persecution from a world that is hostile to God. As Paul reminds Timothy, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).

John's arrest reminds that faithfulness to God's kingdom will sometimes lead to suffering. Those who would seek to enter into that kingdom must prepare themselves for opposition and persecution from those who refuse Jesus' message. Both the herald of the kingdom and the King who came to inaugurate it are arrested and put to death. Before Mark's readers even hear what Jesus has to say, they are introduced to his public ministry with the reminder that there are enemies of the kingdom and faithful members of that kingdom sometimes are handed over to their power.

The Message of the Kingdom

As Jesus comes in to Galilee, his main activity is to preach "the gospel of God." This expression here should be taken to mean "the gospel that comes from God" but it is possible that it could also mean "the gospel about God."²⁶ The message of the kingdom is the gospel, or "good news" that comes from God. The meaning of the phrase "gospel of God" will be unpacked in the content of what Jesus says in verses 14-15. As

²⁵France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 246.

²⁶Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 62. Also Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1961), 36. Stein, *Mark*, 71, describes it as an ablative of source. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 91, does not think a distinction has to be made. The good news is both from God and it is God. He writes, "Jesus himself is, as the ambiguity of the genitive construction in v. 1 conveniently allowed, both the subject and the object of the good news."

Lane writes, “What is meant by ‘the gospel of God’ is defined by the summary of Jesus’ proclamation in Ch. 1:15; each element clarifies God’s decisive action in sending forth his Son at this particular moment in history.”²⁷ Jesus’ preaching consists of two indicative statements that are then followed by two imperatives. The truth that he has come to proclaim is a truth that calls for a response.²⁸

“The Time is Fulfilled”

Jesus’ first indicative statement is that “the time is fulfilled.” This means that the appointed time of God’s salvation has arrived.²⁹ The word here translated “time” (*chairo*) signifies what Morna Hooker calls “a particular, significant point in time.”³⁰ The beginning of Jesus’ public ministry is the decisive moment in salvation history, the moment toward which all preceding promises and events have pointed.³¹ Robert Stein explains the significance of this statement:

The term ‘time’ refers to the decisive point in history having now occurred, to a particular point of time now having arrived, rather than to a span or period of time now taking place. The time being ‘fulfilled’ emphasizes not so much the ending of the old covenantal period as the present arrival of what the OT predicted would one day occur.³²

As was hinted at in the quotations and allusions in the prologue, God’s decisive moment of salvation has come in the person of Jesus.

²⁷Lane, *Mark*, 63-64.

²⁸Gundry, *Mark*, 66.

²⁹Gutiérrez, “Mark 1:14-15,” 429.

³⁰Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 54.

³¹Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 47. He writes, “The announcement of the kingdom at Jesus’ debut in Galilee is presented by Mark as the definitive moment in history. . . . God has brought the time of prophecy as represented in the quotation in 1:2-3 to a close and has inaugurated the final phase of history.”

³²Stein, *Mark*, 73. So too Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 43.

Jesus says that this significant moment in history “is fulfilled.” This is a divine passive, meaning that God is the one who has brought the moment to fulfillment.³³ The perfect tense of the verb makes clear that the fulfillment of the time is something that is not merely imminent; it has already come to pass and describes its current state.³⁴ God has brought about the decisive moment of his promised salvation through the onset of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee.

“The Kingdom of God is at Hand”

The second indicative statement Jesus makes is, “the kingdom of God is at hand.” The good news that God’s salvation has arrived is inseparably connected to the nearness of the kingdom of God.³⁵ What is meant here by the phrase “the kingdom of God”?³⁶ In one sense, Mark has already explained much of what this means in the prologue. He will also use the whole gospel to spell out what is meant by “kingdom of God.”³⁷ The kingdom of God will be defined by what Jesus says and does in Mark’s narrative. To put it simply, the kingdom of God “is primarily a reference to God’s dynamic rule and reign over his people.”³⁸ Cranfield helpfully explains, “So the phrase [kingdom of God] in the Gospels means not the area or the people over which God reigns, but simply God’s rule, his acting as king.”³⁹ Jesus is announcing the arrival of God’s rule, the outworking of his sovereignty over all the nations. The arrival of the

³³Gundry, *Mark*, 65.

³⁴France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 91.

³⁵Brian Vickers, “Mark’s Good News of the Kingdom of God,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 8, no. 3 (2004): 15.

³⁶Stein, *Mark*, 72-73, for a catalogue of ways that “the kingdom of God” could be understood.

³⁷This is laid out in great detail in Vickers, “Mark’s Good News.” So too Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 55.

³⁸Vickers, “Mark’s Good News,” 15.

³⁹Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 65. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 55, says, “The Aramaic phrase underlying the Greek . . . would perhaps be better translated as ‘the kingship of God’: the emphasis is on the rule of God, rather than on the territory where this rule is exercised.”

kingdom of God means the beginning of the subversion of rival powers to his rule and reign.

Jesus says that God's reign is "at hand" or "has come near." This seems like an odd thing to say right after noting that the herald of this kingdom has been thrown into jail. Usually, the arrival of a kingdom is not marked by the imprisonment of its citizens! As noted above, the arrival of the kingdom does not mean immediate deliverance and physical safety for its people. God is working out his promises for salvation and has come to bring his universal reign, but John's arrest and the subsequent narrative about Jesus' rejection, suffering, and death make it plain that the kingdom is not going to come in an immediate outward sense. The kingdom is here, but its full impact is not readily apparent.⁴⁰

In what sense, then, has the kingdom arrived?⁴¹ This phrase is more or less synonymous with the statement that "the time is fulfilled," that is, that the decisive moment of the outworking of God's salvation has come to pass. The time of promise has ended and the time of fulfillment has arrived. As France explains, "To declare that God's kingship has come near is to say that God is now fulfilling his age-long purpose, rather than to point to a specific time or event which can be defined as either already present or still future, but not both."⁴² The beginning of Jesus' public ministry signifies the arrival of the time of fulfillment of God's promises of salvation, which come to pass through the establishment of God's universal reign as king.⁴³ Vickers summarizes the point well

⁴⁰Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 66.

⁴¹Gundry, *Mark*, 64-65, offers convincing arguments that "has drawn near" should be taken as "arrived."

⁴²France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 93. Vickers, "Mark's Good News," 16, agrees that you cannot define the arrival of the kingdom of God with a singular event that is either present or future.

⁴³One could even say that the arrival of the time of fulfillment brings the *re*-establishment of God's universal reign as king. Thomas Schreiner writes, "In one sense, God is always the King of kings and the Lords of lords, reigning over everything that happens. But in another sense, God's rule has been flouted since the fall of humankind, and the Scriptures tell the story of the kingdom regained. . . . The sovereignty of God and his kingship take place in history, in the story recounted in the Scriptures, revealed supremely in the ministry and person of Jesus Christ." Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A*

when he says, “The long expected fulfillment of the OT promise of the eschatological rule and reign of God is breaking into history through the ministry of Jesus. The time of waiting is over, the time of fulfillment is at hand.”⁴⁴

This highlights the point that the kingdom has arrived because Jesus has arrived. Out of the 35 times that the verb *eggizō* (the verb translated “has arrived”) appears in the New Testament, 24 of those refer to something coming near in a spatial sense. In addition, the two other times that Mark uses this verb (11:1; 14:42), he uses it in a spatial sense. So, while the nearness of God’s kingdom refers to the decisive moment where God fulfills his promises for salvation, this moment has come near with the arrival of the person of Jesus.⁴⁵ The kingdom of God has come near to the people because Jesus has come near to the people.⁴⁶ Thus the kingdom of God has arrived temporally because the time of promise had ended and the beginning of fulfillment had begun and it has arrived spatially because Jesus, the king who inaugurates the kingdom, has physically come near. As Lane writes, “The kingdom has drawn near, *spatially* in the person of Jesus who embodies the kingdom in a veiled way, and *temporally* because it is the only event which takes place prior to the end [emphasis original].”⁴⁷

God was moving to bring his promises of salvation and the reality of his universal rule into fruition through the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. As Jesus is among the people preaching the kingdom (1:14-15), casting out demons (1:21-28, 39;

Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), xiii-xiv.

⁴⁴Vickers, “Mark’s Good News,” 15.

⁴⁵Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 68. Cranfield rejects the temporal sense of the arrival of God’s kingdom that France puts forth and which I have explained above. He believes that the kingdom has come near only in the spatial sense. He writes, “It is better here too to understand ‘has come near’ in a spatial rather than a temporal sense. The kingdom of God has come close to men in the person of Jesus, and in his person it actually confronts them.”

⁴⁶Ibid., 66. So also Thomas Schreiner, who writes, “The kingdom was present because the king had come. When Jesus announces that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom is at hand, he makes this announcement because he is present.” Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 459.

⁴⁷Lane, *Mark*, 65.

3:22-27), healing those with various illnesses (1:34), forgiving sins (2:1-12), commanding nature (4:35-41), and even bringing people back from the dead (5:21-24, 35-43), he brings the kingdom near to humanity. These verses describe God's action, what he is bringing about by the exercise of his will. As Mark continues with the summary of the content of Jesus' message, this indicative expression of God's activity calls forth a response from those who hear it.⁴⁸

The Response of the Kingdom

The two indicative statements of the first part of verse 15 are now followed by two imperatives.⁴⁹ The proclamation of the kingdom leads to a call for a response to the kingdom.⁵⁰ Gutiérrez writes, "The kingdom is a gift, a grace of God, but also a demand made upon us."⁵¹ Jesus calls on those who hear him to "repent and believe in the gospel." This is essentially synonymous with the message of the Old Testament prophets who called on the people to return to Yahweh on the basis of his incomparability and sovereignty.⁵² As Lane says, "The summons to 'repent and believe in the gospel' is not new, but a fresh reiteration of the word addressed to men through the prophets."⁵³

Teaching is Jesus' most frequent occupation in the opening chapters of his ministry in Mark, and one must understand that this teaching culminated in a call to repent and believe. As Vickers explains, "From this point in the narrative, people are

⁴⁸Gundry, *Mark*, 66. He writes, "So also the kingdom's having drawn near means that God has drawn near and that God's rule is going to take effect immediately. The immediacy of its effect makes repentance and belief urgent."

⁴⁹Stein, *Mark*, 70, thinks the two imperatives flow from the two indicatives. He writes, "The two imperatives correspond with the two statements as follows: 'The time is fulfilled—[therefore] repent' and 'The kingdom of God has come—[therefore] believe in the gospel.'" So too Gundry, *Mark*, 66.

⁵⁰Vickers, "Mark's Good News," 16.

⁵¹Gutiérrez, "Mark 1:14-15," 429.

⁵²France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 93.

⁵³Lane, *Mark*, 65.

called to abandon their own pre-conceived ideas and expectations and trust in Jesus' way of inaugurating the Kingdom of God."⁵⁴ If one is to enter the kingdom of God, it must be based on their response to how Jesus brings and defines the kingdom. The kingdom confronts people and calls on them to orient their understanding around the person of Jesus. If Jesus has come to bring to pass all the promises of God from the Old Testament, then to reject Jesus means to reject God's salvation and stand under God's judgment.⁵⁵ Jesus gives the proper response to his arrival as repentance and belief.

Repentance

The first imperative Jesus gives is the call to repent. Repentance is a requirement of entrance into the kingdom.⁵⁶ This means that a primary assumption of the kingdom of God is that no one is fit to enter into as they are. The idea that people are basically good and fit for God's kingdom as they currently live their lives is undone by this first necessary condition of entering the kingdom. It has often been pointed out that the verb for "repent" in Greek is a compound word meaning to "change one's mind."⁵⁷ The "mind," however, does not only signify intellect or rationality, as it has a tendency to do in our English usage. In Greek, "mind" meant "attitude, way of thinking as the sum total of the whole mental and moral state of being." It could also mean "the side of life contrasted with physical existence, the higher, mental part of the natural man which initiates his thoughts and plans."⁵⁸ In short, the mind is the human faculty that drives behavior.

⁵⁴Vickers, "Mark's Good News," 16.

⁵⁵Lane, *Mark*, 66.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William Arndt and F. Wilber Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 511.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 544.

Thus to call on people to repent means a call to reorient the way that life is lived. One cannot enter the kingdom of God without a shift in the whole mental and moral state of being. As Jesus is the one who brings the kingdom, it is implied that the shift that is necessary is to put Jesus, who he is and what he says, at the center of one's life.⁵⁹ The attitude of repentance is one that puts Jesus first in everything. Repentance means that Jesus comes before one's own will (Mark 8:34-5), ambition (8:36-37), what other people think about them (8:38), or anything else, regardless of whether it is inherently good or bad, that may cause disobedience to Jesus (9:43-48).⁶⁰ One cannot enter into the kingdom of God's salvation without a total reorientation of one's entire life around Jesus.

Belief

The second imperative Jesus gives is the call to believe the gospel.⁶¹ This is the second time that the word "gospel" appears in Mark's first chapter, as the whole work was introduced as being "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). The gospel is the good news that God is bringing his promises of salvation to pass through the person of Jesus. To believe the gospel, then, is to believe that one comes into God's salvation through Jesus.

Belief entails more than mere mental assent to the facts of the gospel. The phrase "believe in the gospel", as France writes, "probably denotes not only an intellectual acceptance that the 'news' is true, but a response of acceptance and

⁵⁹This is depicted physically in 3:31-35, when Jesus is declaring those who do God's will as his true family. Those who do God's will are described as those who were sitting in a circle around him. They have placed Jesus, literally and figuratively, at the center of their lives.

⁶⁰Michael L. B. Bennett, *Christianity Explained* (Valley Forge, PA: Scripture Union, 2005), 53-55.

⁶¹Bratcher and Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, 37, argue that "believe in the gospel" is a "Marcan Semitism" that simply means "believe the gospel."

commitment.”⁶² In that sense, “believe” here is better understood to mean “trust.”⁶³ In an effort to strengthen the grasp that one has on this point, Bratcher and Nida stack up several phrases that fill out the meaning of this word. They write that “believe” here can be understood as “to join the word to the body,” “to cause a word to enter the insides,” “to leave one’s heart with,” “that which one leans on,” or “to conform with the heart.”⁶⁴ Jesus is not only calling for an intellectual assent to the gospel, he is calling for men, borrowing the language of Proverbs 3:5-6, to trust in the gospel with all the heart, to not lean on one’s own understanding.

Faith and Repentance Inseparable

Though Jesus gives two imperatives, in reality they cannot be separated.⁶⁵ As Wayne Grudem says, “We can look at each of these elements of conversion, and in one sense it does not matter which one we discuss first, for neither one can occur without the other, and they must occur together when true conversion takes place.”⁶⁶ These two imperatives present two side of the same coin. Repentance marks what one turns away *from* and belief in the gospel denotes what one turns *to*.⁶⁷ It is akin to the Old Testament prophets’ call to return to Yahweh (Isa 55:7; Lam 3:40; Hos 6:1; Joel 2:13) with the added nuance that the way one returns is by placing their full confidence and trust in Jesus.⁶⁸

⁶²France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 94.

⁶³Ibid., 93.

⁶⁴Bratcher and Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, 38-39.

⁶⁵See Acts 20:21 where Paul describes his message as testifying “to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus.”

⁶⁶Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 709.

⁶⁷Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 47.

⁶⁸France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 93.

Summary

The indicative statements that the time appointed for God's salvation has arrived and God's rule and reign has begun leads to the invitation to take part in the kingdom through repentance and faith.⁶⁹ People are to participate in God's saving reign by returning to him through faith in Jesus. The announcement of the kingdom calls for a response from those who hear its call. The arrival of this kingdom, however, does not guarantee immediate physical safety for those who respond to the call. John is handed over, is eventually killed (Mark 6:14-29), and this foreshadows Jesus' own suffering (Mark 9:12-13), as well as all those who follow after him (Mark 8:34-38). The kingdom of God's salvation has come but those who enter into it must do so through suffering (Acts 14:22).

Contemporary Application

Two applications can be drawn from these verses. First, people who hear Jesus' call to come to him must understand that following after Jesus is not something that can simply be attached to a person's current way of life. Jesus calls on people to make him the center of their lives. The order of the imperatives that he gives—repent and then believe in the gospel—suggests that repentance is the necessary precursor to belief. As Edwards says, “Belief presupposes repentance and depends upon it.”⁷⁰ There is no faith in Jesus without prior repentance. Though the terms are two sides of the same coin, repentance logically comes first. In order to turn toward Jesus, there must first be a turn away from whatever is currently the focus and center of a person's life.

There are far too many who put their trust in a prayer that was prayed at a young age or a decision to walk an aisle during a moment of sharp conviction during a religious service. These things may very well be the initial event that begins a life of

⁶⁹Vickers, “Mark's Good News,” 16.

⁷⁰Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 47.

repentance and faith but they do not replace lifelong repentance and faith as the bedrock commitments of true entrance into the kingdom of God.⁷¹

In addition, when Christians are pleading with sinners to enter the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus it is important that these commitments not be left out. Too often Christians try to convince unbelievers to make a commitment to Jesus based off of how much better their life will be if they follow him. Other times they make praying a prayer the golden ticket that gains admittance into the kingdom of heaven. Christians must not ask of unbelievers any less than Jesus did as he announced the coming of the kingdom of God. Nothing short of lifelong repentance and reliance upon Jesus will allow someone to enter the saving reign of God.

The second application is that those who do make the decision to return to God by centering their lives upon Jesus must prepare themselves for inevitable suffering. Suffering in this life until the second coming of Jesus is a major emphasis of the New Testament that is too often left out of the church's preaching and teaching. Jesus said that those who leave everything to follow after him should expect persecutions in this life (Mark 10:29-31). Paul told the new churches formed on his first missionary journey that, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). He wrote to the Thessalonian church that no one should be disturbed by afflictions because "you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know" (1 Thess 3:3-4).

Perhaps the clearest text that teaches about how Jesus' followers must follow in his way of suffering is 1 Peter 2:20-21: "But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this

⁷¹Ibid. Edwards writes, "Both verbs in Greek are present imperatives, that is, they enjoin living in a condition of repentance and belief as opposed to momentary acts."

purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps.” We are to arm ourselves to suffer in the flesh just as Jesus did (1 Pet 4:1). We should expect that difficulty and trial will come to all those who desire to follow Jesus (2 Tim 3:12). Perhaps there would be more faithfulness to the cause of the kingdom and more boldness to take it into hard environments, neighborhoods, and nations if the members of the kingdom expected suffering and death as part and parcel of following Jesus.

Missionary Nik Ripken tells the story of meeting with house church leaders in communist China in the 1990s. After meeting an exuberant twenty-five year old pastor who had great passion to speak of Jesus to his neighborhood, Ripken was pulled aside by one of the older pastors in the room. Ripken writes, “After we were out of earshot from that young house-church leader, my host leaned toward me and whispered: ‘He’s going to be someone God can use in a powerful way someday. But you cannot trust what he says now; he hasn’t been to prison yet.’”⁷² Persecution is not only revered in China—it is expected. Notice the seasoned pastor’s comment: “He hasn’t been to prison *yet*.” For these believers, persecution matured and refined a leader to be more faithful and have a greater understanding of what it means to be a herald of God’s kingdom. May we follow faithfully in theirs—and, more importantly, Jesus’—footsteps.

⁷²Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishing Group, 2013), 228.

CHAPTER 5

MARK 1:16-20: THE KINGDOM WORKERS

Jesus is the unmistakable main character of Mark's narrative. Mark opens his gospel by telling his audience that what they are about to read is the "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1). His main purpose is to explain who Jesus is and what he has come to do. This purpose is highlighted throughout the narrative, as both individuals and groups of people ask questions about Jesus.

The people in the Capernaum synagogue, after hearing Jesus teach and drive a demon out of a man, ask in 1:27, "What is this?" In 2:7, once Jesus pronounces a person's sins forgiven, the Pharisees inquire, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" The disciples ask, "Who then is this?" after Jesus calms a violent storm in 4:35-41. The people in Jesus' hometown, after hearing him teach in their synagogue, ask in 6:2-3, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to him, and such miracles as these performed by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon?" Questions concerning who Jesus is and why he says and does certain things fill the early portions of the gospel. Mark has answered these questions for his readers from the opening verses of his gospel: this is the Christ, the Son of God, who has come to establish the kingdom of God's salvation.

Mark's story, however, does not center on Jesus alone. From 1:16 through the rest of the narrative, Jesus is never seen without his disciples.¹ In 1:16-20, Jesus puts

¹R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 94.

forward an authoritative call on the life of four fishermen who lived and worked along the coast of the Sea of Galilee. Upon this call they become Jesus' disciples and, along with him, the main characters in Mark's story.² As Mark tells his readers about who Jesus is, he also shows how Jesus' identity shapes the lives of his followers. The story of Jesus' identity, words, and works is also the story of how the lives and mission of his followers are shaped by these things. For Mark, Christology shapes a proper understanding of discipleship.

Surrounding Context of Mark 1:16-20

In Mark's prologue, comprising the first thirteen verses of the first chapter, he makes clear that the good news of God's salvation promised in the Old Testament has come in Jesus' arrival. The next major section in the gospel runs from 1:14 through 3:6.³ At the beginning of this section in 1:14-15 Jesus comes into Galilee proclaiming a message that the crucial moment of salvation history has arrived with the onset of God's kingdom. Throughout the narrative that unfolds in 1:14-3:6, Jesus' activity shows us what the arrival of this kingdom means: the arrival of God's kingdom is one of tremendous authority, pushing back the kingdom of Satan through exorcisms, calling men to follow him, saving people from all kinds of illnesses, and pronouncing forgiveness for sins.⁴ The onset of God's kingdom is the display of God's authority to rescue people from Satan, sin, and physical sickness. And yet this kingdom also brings demands upon those who hear of it. The proper response to the arrival of the kingdom is a life marked by repentance from sin and reliance upon God's salvation.

²Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 47.

³William Lane, *Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 62.

⁴Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Continuum, 2006), 52.

Verses 16-20 are closely connected to Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom.⁵ For Mark, Jesus' identity and his message as the one who brings in God's kingdom is closely connected to what it means for people to follow him. This first section and the one that follows it (3:7-6:13) both begin with summaries of Jesus' ministry (1:14-15; 3:7-12) that are followed by accounts of the calling or commissioning of Jesus' disciples (1:16-20; 3:13-19).⁶ For Mark, the ideas of kingdom and discipleship are intimately related. The message of the kingdom cannot be properly understood apart from the meaning of discipleship.⁷ The account of Peter, Andrew, John, and James' response to Jesus' call to follow him is a picture of what it means to "repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15) and thus to gain entrance into God's kingdom.⁸

A Model of Discipleship

This story provides a model for Mark's readers of what it means to become a follower of Jesus.⁹ Though all four of the men described in this section will go on to become part of a distinct group of Jesus' disciples known as "the Twelve" (3:13-19; 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11) and will fulfill a special role in Jesus' plan,¹⁰ their story here is

⁵Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary of His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 62. He writes, "We are not to imagine a sharp break between vv 15 and 16. Rather, the participial phrases 'going along to the side of the Sea of Galilee' (v 16a) and 'going on a little' (v 19) carry forward the topographical movement begun in v 14: 'Jesus went into Galilee.' Thus the stories in vv 16-20 tell in further detail how Jesus begins to take action in the power of the Spirit with who he has been endured."

⁶Lane, *Mark*, 62. So too Robert Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 76. So too Donald Cook, "The Call of the Disciples in Mark," *Faith and Mission* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1993): 3-13. Cook argues that four sections beginning with four call narratives set the structure of the first half of Mark's gospel. He writes, "There are four calling narratives in Mark 1:16-8:30/31, involving a great deal of repetition. The repetition, however, is not redundant. It is a carefully crafted literary device used by the evangelist to demonstrate the significance he attaches to discipleship as a proper response to Jesus."

⁷Cf. 4:10-12, where Jesus says to those who were following him, "To you have been given the mystery of the kingdom of God." Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 425-26.

⁸Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 53.

⁹James Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 48.

¹⁰Lane, *Mark*, 69. Though this text serves as a model for how all must respond to Jesus'

meant to be paradigmatic of what it means for anyone to respond properly to Jesus' message to "repent and believe the gospel."¹¹ Jesus arrives and calls on these men to follow him. As Robert Stein notes, "The terms ["follow me"] are not used simply to describe what one must do to become a member of the Twelve but rather what any person must do to become a follower of Jesus."¹² In 8:34, Jesus summons the whole crowd and speaks about what it means to "come after" and "follow" him, indicating that the invitation given to these men here is one that he regularly extended in his teaching among the crowds throughout Galilee and the surrounding areas.

Mark is not only interested in telling his readers about "the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1), he also wants them to understand what it means to become a true follower of Jesus.¹³ Mark introduces these disciples at the very beginning of the book because he wants his readers to identify with them. Though their initial response to Jesus is positive and decisive, they will fail repeatedly throughout the book, and yet are ultimately reconciled to him.¹⁴ This mirrors the experience of all those who seek to follow after Jesus; discipleship is messy and comes with many ups and down, high points of faith and obedience coupled with low points of doubt and failure. As Udo Schnelle

message, it is also a crucial beginning to the special role the Twelve will play in God's kingdom. Lane writes, "[This] is a crucial text for the interpretation of the Gospel by virtue of its primary position. It anticipates the call of the Twelve in Ch. 3:13-19 and their subsequent mission in Ch. 6:7-13, 30, but looks beyond this point to the conclusion of the Gospel. . . . Mark implies that the promise to be made fishers of men finds its fulfillment in the meeting in Galilee promised in Ch. 16:7." Along the same lines, France writes, "From now until Gethsemane Jesus appears in the narrative constantly accompanied by his disciples, and their training and development will be one of the main focuses of the story. They may, and often will, fail him and disappoint him, but their role is crucial to the achievement of his mission, for it is through this flawed and vulnerable group of people that God's kingship will be established." France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 94.

¹¹Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 52. So too Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 53. Guelich does note, "But one should not make the mistake of viewing 1:16-20 as the response to Jesus' preaching in 1:14-15, since the disciples respond specifically to Jesus' call to discipleship." So their response illustrates what it means to repent and believe, but the specific command they are obeying is Jesus' call to follow him.

¹²Stein, *Mark*, 78.

¹³Ibid., 80.

¹⁴Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 75.

says, “The way of faith is also illustrated in [Mark’s] portrayal of the disciples, who respond to Jesus in wholehearted commitment, confess faith in him, and deny and abandon him, but nevertheless are accepted by Jesus.”¹⁵ Mark wants his readers to keep connected in their mind the two ideas of Jesus’ identity and the necessary implications of that identity for how people should respond to him.¹⁶ An understanding of who Jesus is leads to an understanding of what it means to follow him; Christology informs discipleship.

For Mark, Jesus is the main character of his Gospel but from this point onward he is never separated from his disciples. Their failures and misunderstanding, along with how Jesus teaches and brings them through these, are a main part of the story Mark wants to tell.¹⁷ As George Ladd writes,

If Mark’s main theological emphasis is on Christology, a vital subplot is the analysis of what it means to follow Jesus. This theme is explored through a portrayal of Jesus’ first disciples in their privilege and in their failures, in their experience of being with Jesus, and especially in the teaching he gave them.¹⁸

In tracing the experience of Jesus’ disciples throughout their interaction with who Jesus is and what he says and does, “Mark will expect his readers to find the basis, whether by example or by warning, for their own discipleship.”¹⁹

¹⁵Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, 423.

¹⁶Wojciech Kowalski, “The Call to Discipleship: A Challenge to Personal Commitment,” *African Ecclesial Review* 36, no. 6 (1994): 367. He writes, “The account can be understood as a model and a preparation for future invitations to groups of disciples. It is also an important model for our own response to Jesus and a reminder of the need to follow Christ.”

¹⁷France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 94. France calls this pericope the “formation of the ‘Jesus Circle.’”

¹⁸George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 233.

¹⁹France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 94.

Jesus' Call

Discipleship is initiated by Jesus' authoritative call. In Jesus' call one sees the primacy of allegiance to Jesus, a call to engage in his mission, and the demand of complete commitment, one that take priority over even family and occupation.²⁰ Jesus' words to his first disciples form the basis of every generation's understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. Jesus calls to them as one with unparalleled authority, surpassing the authority of any biblical figure that preceded him.

Jesus approaches two groups of men as they are preparing for a day of fishing.²¹ These men were workers in the bustling fishing industry that existed around the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.²² Jesus appears and calls these men to follow after him. There are several similarities between Jesus' call to these fisherman and Elijah's calling of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21.²³ Elijah finds Elisha while he is engaged

²⁰France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 95. Several commentators note all or most of these elements in the call. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 52-53, says that the three elements of Jesus' call are Jesus' authority, the sacrifice involved in responding to the call, and the vocation of the call is to fish for me. He also notes how these are in contrast to how 1st century rabbis gained students. So too James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 49-50. He says that the three aspects of the call are that Jesus gives the summons, people are called to service, and the call uproots them from their natural environment and places them in a new fellowship made up of individuals. So the elements of (1) Jesus' authority, (2) a call to mission, and (3) a call to leave one's family to join a new fellowship are all seen as the essential elements of the call in these commentators.

²¹Stein, *Mark*, 79, writes, "The term 'preparing/mending' can refer to taking care of the nets in ways such as mending them, folding them for storage, or preparing them in various ways for immediate or future use." It is likely Mark wants his readers to understand these men leaving their nets before their work for the day began, not after they were finished for the day.

²²Though it is outside the thrust and scope of this chapter, the fishing industry on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee and these men's likely place within that scene are an interesting study. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 49, notes that there were several towns on the northwest shore of Galilee with fish names. Bethsaida means "house of the fisher," Magdala is "fish tower," and Taricheae means "salted fish." That many towns were named after the fishing industry indicates the prominence of that occupation. Speaking of the men themselves, Edwards writes, "The fishermen whom Jesus called were scarcely indigent day laborers. In order to survive in their market league, they need to be—and doubtlessly were—shrewd and successful business men." Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 50, agrees, noting that Peter and Andrew were most likely the managers of the fishing business, those who owned boats and operated them, and were not the illiterate, simple people who would have been hired hands. This is certainly true of James and John, who were wealthy enough to have hired hands who worked in their family business. These men were by no means of high standing or status in Israelite society, but they were likely intelligent and successful. So too France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 98.

²³Stein, *Mark*, 76. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentaries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 70, sees the call of Elisha as an interesting story to compare with this account but does not think there was any intentional influence of the Elisha account on how Mark narrates the calling of Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

in the act of plowing in a field. Elijah lays his mantle upon Elisha, indicating a call to follow in his steps as a prophet,²⁴ and Elisha then follows and ministers to Elijah. The form of the story is strikingly similar to Mark's narrative here.

While there are some similarities between the two accounts, there is one major difference. As Elijah extends the call to Elisha, Elisha turns back at first from Elijah and goes home to kiss his family and enjoy a feast with those in his hometown before leaving and following Elijah. In Jesus' call to these first disciples, Jesus extends the call and all four of the men immediately leave behind occupation, family, and household to follow Jesus. Jesus calls these men after himself with complete authority to command their lives. His authority exceeds that of one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament.²⁵ Jesus issues an authoritative call that invites the men into his kingdom mission.

The Authoritative Command

As Jesus goes along the Sea of Galilee, he first sees Peter and Andrew as they are fishing.²⁶ He gives a simple command: "Follow me" (1:17). It is obvious from what happens next that the disciples understood this call to demand an instant response. Mark reports, "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." They understood that Jesus was calling them to a break with their current way of life to re-orient their lives around going where Jesus goes.²⁷ Speaking of the visual impact of the command, "Follow me," Robert Guelich writes, "The imagery graphically depicts the pupil's role and relationship

²⁴Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 725. Waltke notes that after Elijah is taken up to heaven, he tears his own cloak in pieces and permanently takes up Elijah's mantle, indicating he intends to serve as his replacement.

²⁵Gundry, *Mark*, 67.

²⁶Mark says they were "casting a net in the sea." Stein, *Mark*, 77, explains the action: "A casting net was a circular net up to twenty feet in diameter with stone weights attached to the ends. An attached rope, when pulled, drew the net together and enclosed the fish. The net was thrown and drawn together by a single individual and could be thrown from a boat or while wading along the shore."

²⁷Lane, *Mark*, 67.

to the master illustrated by the disciples' following the teacher who leads the way."²⁸ Coming after Jesus for these men means going where he goes and submitting to his authority.²⁹

One of the major themes of the first section of Mark's gospel is the display of Jesus' authority. This account serves as a vivid depiction that introduces this major theme.³⁰ In the verses that follow this call narrative, Jesus will teach in the synagogue with authority (1:22), drive out a demon (1:23-27), heal various kinds of physical and spiritual malady in Capernaum (1:29-34), exercise divine authority to forgive sins (2:1-12), command more followers (2:14), and claim lordship over the Sabbath (2:23-3:6). The call to the disciples to leave behind occupation and family is an initial demonstration of Jesus' authority.

The way in which Mark narrates the account of Peter, Andrew, James, and John's call further highlights this authority. First, the sheer brevity of the account is striking.³¹ Jesus sees the disciples, commands them to follow him, and they obey. The whole narrative of four men completely abandoning their lives to follow Jesus comprises only five sentences of narrative. Second, their lack of hesitation to heed this call also affirms Jesus' authority.³² Third, Jesus' call to his disciples went against conventional ways that rabbis gained students in the 1st century. Students generally decided which rabbi they wanted to follow and under whom they wished to study, but Jesus here initiates the relationship.³³ For a rabbi to approach potential students and demand allegiance over

²⁸Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 50-51.

²⁹Brooks, *Mark*, 48.

³⁰Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 69.

³¹Lane, *Mark*, 69.

³²Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 59.

³³Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 51.

even the closest of family ties would have been completely foreign to a 1st century audience.³⁴ Fourth, when students came to study under a rabbi, the focus of their study and the object of their devotion was not the rabbi himself but the Torah. But Jesus here calls the disciples to come after himself. James Edwards explains, “The personal prominence that Jesus assumes in the call of the four fishermen is highly unusual in Jewish tradition as a whole. The chief allegiance of rabbinic students was to the Torah rather than to a particular rabbi.”³⁵ All of these elements stress the authority of Jesus’ call to the disciples.³⁶ Discipleship is first of all defined by a willingness to submit one’s life to the authority of Jesus.

The Resulting Mission

Following after Jesus will then lead to a new occupation. Jesus has called these men to transform them from fishermen to fishers of men.³⁷ When Jesus found them they were fishing for fish but their new life that is centered on him will turn them into those who reel in humans.³⁸ Discipleship includes helping bring others to center their lives around Jesus as well.

³⁴France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 96.

³⁵Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 49.

³⁶Robert Calhoun, “The Power of the Call: Wilhelm Bousset on Miracle, and Mark 1:16-20,” *Early Christianity* 6, no. 1 (2015): 67-88. He emphasizes Jesus’ authority to the point that he argues that Mark narrates the call as the first miracle in the gospel. He argues first that one needs to understand a miracle as a display of divine authority that was intended to create wonder, not a mere technical definition of something that transgresses the normal laws of physics. He argues that Mark intentionally narrates his call story differently from contemporary examples of call stories in order to demonstrate that this call was not normal but an exertion of divine power to command lives in an extraordinary way.

³⁷Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 50, says there is significance in Jesus’ saying, “I will make you *become* fishers of men [emphasis added].” He writes, “The process of becoming disciples of Jesus is a slow and painful one for the Twelve; it is not easy to understand, to watch, to follow, to suffer persecution for the cause of Jesus. The life to which Jesus calls disciples requires a fundamental change of perspective, to have in mind the things of God rather than self. Only thus can disciples participate in and serve the kingdom.” In other words, they are not yet fit to be fishers of men but Jesus intends to teach them how to become fishers of men through his time and ministry alongside them. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 51, also draws attention to the future tense of “I will make” and says, “The future tense indicates what will transpire in the disciples’ lives and anticipates their future ministry.”

³⁸Robert Bratcher and Eugene Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1961), 41, suggest, “make you become ones who are men bringers” is an accurate way to translate the phrase.

But what lies behind the phrase “fishers of men?” The imagery of fishing for people is common in the Old Testament (Ezek 29:4f; 38:4; Amos 4:2; Hab 1:14-17).³⁹

The clearest possible Old Testament background is Jeremiah 16:16-18. It says,

“Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen,” declares the LORD, “and they will fish for them; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and every hill and from the clefts of the rocks. For my eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from my face, nor is their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land; they have filled my inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable idols and with their abominations.”

In all of these passages, the fishing imagery is seemingly used in a negative sense to speak of God dragging his people away into judgment while Jesus employs the image in a positive way. This leads many commentators to say that Jesus’ reference here to making his disciples “fishers of men” is not referring to any Old Testament text but is merely a play on their current occupation.⁴⁰

But a closer look at the surrounding context of the Jeremiah passage shows that it should be seen as the text that lies behind Jesus’ mission directive here. It is true that Jeremiah 16:16-18 focuses on judgment but 16:14-15 is the opening of the oracle of which 16:16-18 is a part. It says,

“Therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where he had banished them.’ For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.”

The immediate context of the fishing for God’s people in Jeremiah 16 is God’s promise to restore his people to the land. The main idea is that of promise and salvation. In Mark’s gospel, he has stressed throughout the first chapter that the arrival of Jesus signals the time of the fulfillment of God’s promises. Fulfillment of promise is the context of both Jeremiah 16:14-18 and the preceding material to this call narrative in Mark’s gospel.

³⁹Lane, *Mark*, 67.

⁴⁰Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 51. Also Stein, *Mark*, 78, and France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 96.

Thus, as Lane writes, “To interpret [I will make you become fishers of men] only as a play on words appropriate to the situation is to fail to appreciate its biblical background and its relevance to the context, which has focused attention on God’s eschatological act in sending Jesus.”⁴¹

The element of judgment, however, that is obvious in Jeremiah 16 is not to be denied. God promises to bring eschatological salvation but, as Jeremiah 16:18 says, God “will *first* doubly repay their iniquity and their sin [emphasis mine].” Judgment will fall before salvation is accomplished. To play upon James Hamilton’s phrase, God’s glory in salvation will only come about through judgment.⁴² God will send forth fishermen and hunters to gather his people together where their sins will be judged and through this judgment will come about his promises of salvation and restoration.

The impending judgment is still the impetus behind the call of the kingdom in Mark’s gospel. Jesus is going to make his followers fishers of men in light of impending judgment.⁴³ This is implicit in Jesus’ call in Mark 1:15 for repentance. The call for repentance implies that judgment will fall if that call is not obeyed. What becomes obvious, however, as the gospel unfolds is that Jesus is gathering God’s people after himself and he himself will shoulder the judgment of God upon their sins. Through this judgment will come his followers’ salvation.⁴⁴ As Jesus will say later in Mark 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

⁴¹Lane, *Mark*, 67.

⁴²James Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

⁴³Lane, *Mark*, 68.

⁴⁴Brooks, *Mark*, 48. He writes, “The idea of God calling persons to fish for people is found in the Old Testament, most clearly in Jer 16:16; but there the purpose was to bring people to judgment. Here it was to escape judgment.”

Summary

Jesus calls these men to break with their current lifestyles and come under his authority. While following after him, Jesus will teach and transform them into those who will gather God's people to be rescued from God's wrath by taking shelter under Jesus. Jesus' call centers on his authority, issues forth in a summons to show him complete allegiance, and embarks upon preparation for the mission of kingdom proclamation and expansion. This is the essence of Christian discipleship.

Jesus' Authoritative Call Demands Decisive Sacrifice

Jesus' authority and kingdom mission are the basis of the call to discipleship. How, then, should one respond to it? James Brooks summarizes the answer when he explains that this is "the way in which all should respond to Jesus' summons: promptly and completely."⁴⁵ Wojciech Kowalski explains, "God's call through Christ comes with a divine power which demands an unconditional response, abandoning of the present lifestyle and embracing of a new life goal."⁴⁶ The response to Jesus must be decisive and it will almost certainly require sacrifice of some kind. Peter and Andrew's call story stresses the decisive nature of the resolution to follow Jesus and that of James and John show that sacrifice will be involved.

The Decision to Follow Jesus Must Be Decisive

Mark's narration of Peter⁴⁷ and Andrew's call to discipleship stresses the decisiveness required in choosing to follow Jesus. The account of these young men leaving everything they have ever known is abrupt, told in mere sentences. They

⁴⁵Brooks, *Mark*, 48.

⁴⁶Kowalski, "The Call to Discipleship," 367.

⁴⁷Peter is called by his original name Simon here and in the narrative up until 3:16, where Mark notes that Jesus gave him the name Peter. He is referred to as Peter in the rest of the narrative. I have chosen to call him Peter here since that is the name with which most people are familiar for this disciple.

understand that Jesus' call upon their lives demands a decision on the spot, with no time to set their affairs in order before choosing how they will answer.⁴⁸ Heightening the sense of immediacy is the fact that Mark relays no previous encounter between Jesus and these men.⁴⁹ What is important is not how much these men know about Jesus but what they will decide to do when Jesus extends his authoritative call over their lives. Mark reports that Peter and Andrew "immediately" leave their nets to follow after Jesus.⁵⁰ They serve as the model of the kind of decisiveness demanded when the call to discipleship is given.

The Decision to Follow Jesus Will Be Sacrificial

James Brooks says, "If the action of Simon and Andrew illustrates prompt response, that of James and John illustrates complete response. Following Jesus is costly and sometimes even involves severing family ties."⁵¹ In telling his readers about James and John's response to Jesus, he does not mention that they leave their professions, though this is of course implied. Mark instead says that they "left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow him" (1:20). Jesus' call extended beyond a new occupation in to a whole new orientation of family ties. As Robert Gundry explains, "It is one thing to leave an occupation, but to leave one's father,

⁴⁸Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 60. It is not a part of Mark's narrative but see also Luke 9:57-62 where Jesus forbids attending a father's funeral and saying goodbye to those in one's household. As mentioned above, this is in contrast to Elisha's response to Elijah's call, as Elisha first bids farewell to his family and has a parting feast with his hometown.

⁴⁹Brooks, *Mark*, 48.

⁵⁰The word "immediately" is used frequently throughout Mark as a simple connective without any intention to convey a sense of actual immediacy. It should, however, maintain its natural meaning here. Stein, *Mark*, 78-79, explains, "Although the phrase 'And immediately' is usually a simple connective lacking any serious temporal dimension, here it appears that Mark gives it a full temporal significance. In so doing, Mark emphasizes the importance of responding speedily to Jesus's call to discipleship." France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 97, disagrees and thinks that "immediately" appears here in order "to keep the story going with vigor" more so "than to comment on the specific nature of their response."

⁵¹Brooks, *Mark*, 49.

especially to do so despite the patriarchalism of ancient Jewish society” would have been extremely stunning to Mark’s 1st century readers.⁵² One commentator even notes that in light of the fifth commandment (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16), the stress upon close adherence to a father’s instruction in the book of Proverbs (1:8; 4:1; 6:20; 23:22-25), and the focus on allegiance to one’s father in Jewish literature (Tob 5:1; Sir 3:1-16, esp. v. 16, “Whoever forsakes a father is like a blasphemer”), James and John’s response “would have appeared blasphemous.”⁵³ Yet this is what Jesus’ call demanded. Not even the closest familial relationships are allowed to remain more binding than Jesus’ call to discipleship.⁵⁴

Summary

In this decisive, sacrificial break with their former lives to follow Jesus, these men show that true faith in Jesus is not defined by mere mental assent to a defined system of doctrine. As James Edwards says, “The act of following Jesus entails a risk of faith, and faith must be an act before it is a content of belief.”⁵⁵ That is not to say that doctrine is unimportant; rather, it is to stress that faith for Mark is something more than an agreement with a particular set of beliefs. It is a decision that requires the complete commitment of one’s life. If a person wants to be Jesus’ disciple, they have to be willing to give up everything, from possessions to lifestyle, potentially even close family relationships.⁵⁶

⁵²Gundry, *Mark*, 67.

⁵³Stein, *Mark*, 80.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 50.

⁵⁶Stein, *Mark*, 80.

Christology and Discipleship

Jesus extends an authoritative call on the lives of these men and they respond with decisive and sacrificial allegiance. William Lane then asks the essential question: “The urgency in Jesus’ call and the radical obedience of the fishermen pose the question, ‘Who, then, is this who calls?’”⁵⁷ There is an intimate link in Mark’s mind between who Jesus is and the nature of discipleship.⁵⁸ Those who follow Jesus are not defined by adherence to a particular kind of teaching. They are not those who strive to live by a set of ethics. They do not belong to a particular school of interpretation. They are defined solely by their allegiance to a person, to the one who Mark says is “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (1:1).⁵⁹

For any human being to demand such total allegiance from another person is incredible.⁶⁰ Thus Jesus’ call on these men’s lives demands a heightened understanding of who he is. His call to the disciples is not rooted in the authority of the Law, or even as a representation of God’s authority. As James Edwards says, it is rooted “in Jesus’ messianic authority alone.”⁶¹ Mark’s prologue spelled out the significance of who Jesus is by tying his identity to Old Testament promises of salvation and marking his arrival as the definitive moment in history. This text makes clear that Jesus’ identity as the fulfillment of both God’s saving activity and the arrival of his eschatological kingdom invest him with the authority to command men’s lives. In Donald Cook’s words, Mark’s “understanding of discipleship” is “heavily weighted with Christology.”⁶² The story of

⁵⁷Lane, *Mark*, 69.

⁵⁸Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 49.

⁵⁹Stein, *Mark*, 78.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 81.

⁶¹Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 50.

⁶²Cook, “The Call of the Disciples in Mark,” 3.

who Jesus is and what he says and does is also the story of how these things shape the lives of those over whom Jesus extends his authoritative call.

Contemporary Application

The main question that this text leaves on the readers of Mark's gospel is, "Am I ready to respond to Jesus' call in the same way that these first disciples did?" To use Kowalski's words quoted earlier, this passage asks its readers if they are ready to abandon their present life-style and embrace a new life goal that is centered around Jesus and the mission of his kingdom.⁶³ This passage demonstrates that those who hear Jesus' call on their lives must be ready to respond both decisively and sacrificially. It is not those who pray a prayer that are to be considered followers of Jesus. It is not even those who have orthodox beliefs about Jesus that can be counted among his disciples. While a prayer may be utilized to express faith and commitment to Jesus and orthodox beliefs about Jesus are certainly necessary, these by themselves do not ensure that one is a follower of Jesus in the sense that Mark describes here. It is those who respond to his call with an absolute and complete realignment of values and priorities, displaying a commitment to Jesus that goes above even the most intimate and integral of human relationships.

This element of decisive, sacrificial following of Jesus is much needed in the modern church culture of easy-believism and low commitment Christianity. Church membership rolls are filled with the name of individuals who made one-time "commitments" to Jesus but lives virtually unchanged lives. Others have heard Jesus' call to come follow him but are unwilling to encounter the type of familial unrest that would result from such a decision. Many sacrifice a commitment to Jesus on the altar of comfort, ease, and maintaining a sense of peace among their families. One cannot,

⁶³Kowalski, "The Call to Discipleship," 367.

however, follow Jesus without forsaking the idols of security and leaving behind the gods of family peace.

Though Jesus' call requires a decisive readiness to sacrifice all for his sake, it must be remembered that the focus is not solely on what is left behind. The focus also lies in the task to which the disciples are called. In leaving family behind, the disciples become a part of God's kingdom. They cease fishing for their own profit and now seek to fish for men to enter into God's kingdom themselves. They may lose a bond with an earthly father but are now engaged in the work of a heavenly father, one who calls them to a glorious kingdom of salvation. Becoming a disciple involves becoming a missionary wherever God calls one to be.

It is also true that the call Jesus places on these men to give up their lives is mirrored in his own willingness to give up his life as a ransom for them (Mark 10:45). The reader of Mark's gospel will come to learn as they move forward to the end of the gospel that, as Robert Stein says, "this Jesus asks less from his followers than he gives."⁶⁴ Jesus has come with the authority of one who proclaims the onset of God's victorious kingdom but he has also come as one who serves, as one who will lay down his life for the sake of his followers. Jesus does not ask people to give up their lives to serve him. He asks them to join him on his walk toward death, where he gives his life for them. He does not ask of them less than he is willing to give. "If any man would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (8:34). The authoritative Son of God who commands our life is also the Suffering Servant who gives his life for those he commands.

⁶⁴Stein, *Mark*, 81.

CHAPTER 6

MARK 1:21-28: THE KINGDOM AUTHORITY

My grandfather was a frightening man. With a fearsome combination of size and a constantly unfavorable disposition, he dominated every room he was in. He was a gruff old man whose deep voice pealed like thunder in my pre-adolescent ears. And his bite was as bad as his bark. I dared not cross him or behave in a way he felt was inappropriate, or I would bear the brunt of his wrath. I spent my yearly childhood visits to my grandparents' home in constant fear and awareness of his presence. In my eyes he was larger than life itself.

Thus it was a surreal experience to see him lying motionless in a coffin after suffering a fatal heart attack. It was the first time I had ever seen a lifeless body. His funeral served as my introduction to the reality that there are forces at work in the world that are stronger than even the strongest of men. How could *this* man be resting unresponsive in a box? As years went on from this first encounter with death, I learned that more forces than just physical death can overcome and conquer humanity. I saw pride tear apart a church family I loved. I watched helplessly as pure lust broke up a close family member's marriage. I stared at a television screen and watched the aftermath of men filled with hate who used populated planes as the battering rams of their rage.

If the kingdom of God is to be the culmination of God's promises of salvation, it must come with a power that is able to rescue people from this rampage of sin, lies, and death.¹ If God is going to restore peace and real redemption through the arrival of his

¹George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 50.

kingdom, it must have the authority to deal with all the forces that plague life within this world.² Mark 1:21-28 shows that Jesus has come to bring the kingdom of God with an authority that overpowers and expels the forces of evil and sets free those who have been held captive under their sway.³ The inauguration of the kingdom in Jesus is the beginning of God's authoritative power that expels the kingdom of Satan and all the pain and despair that his twisted rule has wrecked upon mankind.

Surrounding Context of Mark 1:21-28

John's appearance in the wilderness marks the inauguration of God's promises of salvation for his people. Signs from heaven then attend Jesus' baptism, signs which harken back to specific Old Testament texts. This shows that these miraculous signs indicate that the time of God's deliverance prefigured by these texts has begun. Jesus then makes this explicit as he enters into Galilee proclaiming that the crucial moment in history has arrived—God's kingdom has drawn near. Jesus' appearance marks the inauguration of God's kingdom and all men everywhere are now bound to repent and believe in God's saving message. After summarizing Jesus' kingdom announcement, Mark reports how Jesus then recruits men who both serve as an example of the proper response to his message and as the ones he will use to accomplish God's redemptive work.

The account of Jesus' exorcism of a demon-possessed man in Capernaum in 1:21-28 immediately follows the calling and commissioning of the first disciples. Mark makes clear that these men are present with Jesus during the exorcism, indicating that

²Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way Its Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 9-12. Plantinga describes sin as a breaking of the *shalom* of God's creation.

³Graham Twelftree, "Spiritual Powers," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 798, explains that Jesus' battle with the demonic in the exorcism accounts in the New Testament signals a battle not just with Satan but with "that which contaminates his creation."

their presence is significant for the story he wants to tell. Mark begins verse 21 by saying, “*They* went into Capernaum [emphasis mine].”⁴ While Jesus takes center stage during the story, he is acting in connection with those he has just called. Whatever the import of the exorcism narrative, it has significance for the newly commissioned followers of Jesus; they too will exhibit this same authority in exorcism (Mark 3:15; 6:7-13; 9:29). Jesus’ activity here is one he will delegate to his followers.⁵

The Kingdom Authority of Jesus

Mark 1:21-28 describes the encounter between Jesus and a demon-possessed man in a Capernaum synagogue. Mark’s main intention in relating this account is to show that Jesus has come to bring in the kingdom of God with an authority that frees people from the bondage of Satan’s kingdom. Jesus will perform many acts of healing that are physical in nature but Mark narrates this spiritual encounter first because he wants his readers to know that the primary oppression from which Jesus came to free people is spiritual in nature.⁶ George Ladd describes this well when he says,

The demonic is absolutely essential in understanding Jesus’ interpretation of the picture of sin and of humanity’s need for the Kingdom of God. People are in bondage to a personal power stronger than themselves. At the very heart of our Lord’s mission is the need of rescuing people from bondage to the satanic kingdom and to bring them into the sphere of God’s Kingdom. Anything less than this involves an essential reinterpretation of some of the basic facts of the gospel.⁷

The opening verses of Mark’s gospel announce that Jesus’ arrival in Galilee marked the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s Old Testament promises of salvation.

⁴William Lane, *Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 71.

⁵Twelfree, “Spiritual Powers,” 801. He explains that the Bible depicts God as sovereign over all evil powers and their destruction is sure. This destruction “takes place in the ministry of Jesus, either focused in his exorcisms or in the cross event, and is then played out in the ministry of his followers and in the very existence of the church.”

⁶R. T. France, *Divine Government: God’s Kingship in the Gospel of Mark* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1990), 46-47. So too Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 49-50.

⁷Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 50.

Mark identified the “beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God,” by announcing that Jesus’ arrival fulfilled salvation promises written in the prophet Isaiah. This story of an exorcism in Capernaum shows that the fulfillment of these salvation promises are commenced in Jesus rescuing this man from the demonic possession that demonstrates the dominion of Satan’s kingdom over his life.⁸

Verses 21-28 clarify the inevitable outcome of the struggle began in 1:12-13.⁹ Verses 12-13 showed that an integral part of Jesus’ mission was to engage with Satan and the present verses show that Satan and his kingdom will be no match for the power and authority that comes with Jesus.¹⁰ This is demonstrated over and over again as the rest of Mark’s description of Jesus’ ministry is marked by exorcisms.¹¹ Jesus and Satan engage in battle at the beginning of the book and then Mark begins demonstrating Jesus’ authoritative march of victory in this conflict with a story of Jesus freeing a man inhabited by a demon.

Jesus’ Authority Displayed in Words

Jesus’ teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath in Capernaum provides the

⁸G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 696. Speaking of the connection between Isaiah’s promises of salvation and this exorcism story, Beale writes, “On the one hand, the captives in Isaiah were in captivity to Babylon, and Babylon’s power was represented by its idols. On the other hand, in Mark, it is the unclean spirits who are the ultimate oppressors, and who probably were understood to be the ultimate power behind idols. Accordingly, Jesus’ releasing people from the power of demons by casting them out appears to be how Mark understands part of the beginning fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of release from exile and Babylonian bondage.”

⁹J. A. Alexander, *Mark*, The Geneva Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 18.

¹⁰France, *Divine Government*, 29. He writes, “The exorcisms . . . are part of the victorious irruption of the kingship of God into the kingship of Satan.”

¹¹Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 154. He writes, “There is evidence to suggest that for Mark Jesus’ authority over the unclean spirits is the signal hallmark of his activity and one which Mark is concerned for his readers to note. . . . Might it not be that Mark’s recording of this event as the first of Jesus’ mighty acts is equally important, and is intended to alert the reader to a key feature of Jesus’ ministry? And even more so given Mark’s sustained interest in Jesus’ exorcisms?”

crucial background for this encounter with the demonic.¹² Synagogues, while not places where sacrifices and other cultic rituals were performed by priests, functioned as gathering places where the Old Testament was read, explained, and applied to every day life.¹³ It was not an uncommon practice to invite visiting preachers to read the Scriptures or speak at synagogue services and it is possible that Jesus took advantage of this custom on this occasion.¹⁴ Jesus is teaching, an activity that will be his frequent occupation throughout the gospel (2:1-2, 13; 3:23; 4:1-34; 6:2, 6b, 34; 7:14; 8:34-38; cf. 10:1). For Mark, Jesus' authority is tied intimately to his identity as one who teaches; the authority of the kingdom of God comes through words.¹⁵ As this text will show, the authority of his words is physically demonstrated through the exorcism of the unclean spirit. There is an intimate tie between the authority of teaching and the authority that drives out the demon.

The Unique Authority of Jesus' Teaching

In verse 27 the crowd remarks on the unique authority Jesus displayed in his teaching. Two things marked off Jesus' teaching as unique. First, his manner of teaching had an authority that was not possessed by the scribes of the day. Scribes were, as James Edwards explains, "experts in the Torah who were capable of issuing binding decisions on its interpretation."¹⁶ They studied, expounded, and applied the law and had a place of

¹²Though Jesus' activity on the Sabbath will become a source of contention with religious leaders later in the gospel (2:23-3:6), there is no hint of Sabbath controversy here.

¹³James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 53.

¹⁴James Brooks, *Mark*, New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 50. He also notes that this may indicate that Jesus "had already established a reputation as a teacher and that this was not one of the first events of his ministry."

¹⁵Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 55. So too Brooks, *Mark*, 50.

¹⁶Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 54.

prominence in Jewish society as the teachers and guardians of God's word.¹⁷ Jesus' teaching, however, went beyond exposition and application. As J. A. Alexander writes, "He taught them, not as a mere expounder, but with the original authority belonging to the author of the law expounded."¹⁸

As William Lane explains, Jesus' teaching came

with a sovereign authority which permitted neither debate nor theoretical reflection, confronting the congregation with the absolute claim of God upon their whole person. Jesus' teaching recalled the categorical demand of the prophets rather than scribal tradition.¹⁹

Mark does not give the content of what Jesus said but it is likely that the main thrust can be summarized by the announcement in 1:15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."²⁰ Jesus' teaching came with an authority that bound the hearer to respond in repentance and faith, an authority that was absent from scribal teaching of the day.

Second, Jesus spoke with such unrivaled authority that people were dumbfounded when they heard it. The verb Mark uses is the passive form of the verb *ekplēssō*, which means, "to strike out of one's senses."²¹ It is one of Mark's favorite descriptions of a crowd's reaction to Jesus' teaching (6:2; 10:26; 11:18)²² and it usually describes a sense of uneasiness with what Jesus is saying (cf. 6:2; 10:26). Jesus' authoritative teaching disturbs people precisely because it comes with an uncommon ability to bind the hearer to obedience.

¹⁷Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 54. Commenting on the scribes' social status Edwards writes, "Commoners deferred to scribes as they walked through the streets. The first seats in the synagogues were reserved for scribes, and people rose to their feet when they entered a room."

¹⁸Alexander, *Mark*, 20.

¹⁹Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 72.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 71-72.

²¹Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 244.

²²Mark also uses it in 7:37 to describe the crowd's reaction to Jesus healing a man who was impaired in both hearing and speech.

Jesus' Authoritative Word Displayed in Deed

The authority that dumbfounds the synagogue audience is then visually displayed in Jesus' encounter with the demonic. As Jesus is teaching, "a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit" (1:23) raises up to challenge him. The man cries out, "What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth?" Though the man possessed by the unclean spirit poses his opening remark as a question, it is in fact an audacious demand. The phrase translated, "What business do we have with each other" (in Greek *ti hēmin kai soi*) occurs frequently in the Old Testament as a statement of contention or hostility.²³ It calls into question Jesus' right to display his authority in the synagogue and is tantamount to saying, "This is my territory; go away and leave me alone!"²⁴

As Jesus is speaking in the synagogue with an authority that compels people to bend their wills to God, this demon stakes its claim to continue its dominance over the man it possesses.²⁵ The demon seeks to put Jesus on the defensive, demanding that he justify his presence in the synagogue.²⁶ The demons' opposition raises an important question: Does this Jesus who demands obedience from those who hear him have authority in the spiritual realm? Does he in fact have a greater authority than the scribes, demonstrated by commanding not only people but also the spiritual forces that seek control over humanity? What is the relationship between Jesus' ministry and the spiritual realm?

A brief word about demon possession. Before going further in describing

²³Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 154.

²⁴Alexander, *Mark*, 21. So too Stein, *Mark*, 87.

²⁵Alexander, *Mark*, 21.

²⁶Brooks, *Mark*, 51. So too Guelicch, *Mark 1-8:26*, 56-57. Guelicch explains that this question is almost always posed by one in an inferior position to a superior. This is contra Stein, *Mark*, 87, who points out that this does not seem to be the case in John 2:4, 2 Sam 16:10, or 2 Sam 19:23.

this conflict that unfolds between Jesus and the demon possessed man, it is important to have at least a basic understanding of how Mark portrays demon possession. A brief survey of Mark's treatment of possession yields two important considerations.

First, Mark distinguishes demon possession from mental or physical illness.²⁷ Sometimes scholars who deny the supernatural claim that demon possession in the Bible is only a pre-modern way of describing mental illness or other physical maladies. Yet Mark makes clear that this is not the case. This is seen most clearly in that those who are possessed by demons display a deeper understanding of spiritual realities that mere mental illness would not create.

William Lane notes that in the gospel people call Jesus "Lord" (7:8), "teacher" (9:17), "Son of David" (10:47-48), and "Master" (10:51). The demons, however, call him "the Holy One of God" (1:24), "the Son of God" (3:11), or "the Son of the Most High God" (5:7).²⁸ He writes, "The contrast in address is an important characteristic distinguishing ordinary sickness from demonic possession, and reflects the superior knowledge of the demons."²⁹ For Mark, a demon possessed person is one who has their center of consciousness taken over by entities with higher spiritual knowledge to the point that it controls their speech and actions.³⁰ As Mark will make clear in 3:23-27, demon possession consists of Satan exercising his dominion over an individual by sending a demon under his authority to take control of a person's entire personality.³¹ Mark distinguishes demon possession from any physical ailment when he differentiates between Jesus' acts of healing and his acts of exorcism (1:34).

²⁷Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 49.

²⁸France, *Divine Government*, 100-103 also notes how the demons recognize Jesus' divinity through Mark's gospel even if no human beings do until the very end with the cry of the centurion in 15:39.

²⁹Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 74.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 73.

³¹Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 49.

The second thing to note about demon possession is that it defiles the one who is possessed. Mark designates the spirit that possesses the man in the synagogue as “unclean” (in Greek *akathartos*). These spirits are unclean, morally perverse and contrary to holiness.³² Spirits are always designated with this adjective *akathartos* throughout Mark’s gospel (1:23, 26; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25), which in other New Testament writings has both moral and cultic implications.³³ They defile the ones they inhabit and create a separation between the person and God.³⁴ Thus, both by virtue of their domination by Satan and the uncleanness of the spirits that inhabit them, those who are possessed are outside of the kingdom of God. If those who are possessed by demons are to enter the kingdom of God, they will first need to have Satan’s presence removed from them through being liberated from demonic control.

A spiritual encounter. The encounter with the possessed man is short and to the point, comprising only four verses. In an attempt to challenge Jesus’ presence in the synagogue, the demon approaches and demands an explanation from Jesus for why he has come. The demon asks, “Have you come to destroy us?”³⁵ It is a vain attempt to put Jesus on the defensive by questioning his presence and purpose. However, by the very nature of its question about whether Jesus has appeared for its destruction the demon shows that it understands the full significance of Jesus’ presence and authoritative activity.³⁶ It knows that preeminence in the synagogue is not what is ultimately at

³² Alexander, *Mark*, 21.

³³ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 29.

³⁴ Twelftree, “Spiritual Powers,” 798.

³⁵ Both Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 73, and Brooks, *Mark*, 51, think that this should be translated as an assertion: “You have come to destroy us!” The interrogation of the demon is a vain attempt to assert some kind of authority over Jesus, even though, ironically, his questions belie that he knows Jesus is superior! This is contra Stein, *Mark*, 88, who argues that the context suggests it should be read as a question: “What are you doing here? Have you come for this purpose?”

³⁶ Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark*, 154-55.

stake—Jesus has come to obliterate the entire demonic kingdom. The demon speaks with the first person plural pronouns “we” and “us”.³⁷ As George Ladd explains, “We must recognize in the exorcism of demons a consciousness on the part of Jesus of engaging in an actual conflict with the spirit world, a conflict that lay at the heart of his messianic mission.”³⁸ Jesus has come, not only to engage this particular demon, but also to put an end to Satan’s entire spiritual dominion among mankind.

The spiritual nature of Jesus’ ministry has already been implied in the preceding verses of Mark’s gospel. Mark records how John declares that Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit. Likewise, at the outset of Jesus’ ministry, he is endowed from heaven with the Spirit of God. He then goes out to the wilderness and engages in a struggle with Satan only to emerge and declare that the kingdom of God had come near. Jesus has come to do spiritual battle with the prince of the evil, unclean spiritual world. It is clear that Jesus’ ministry will have a spiritual emphasis right from the start and this is borne out in the fact that his first public act is an encounter with the unclean spiritual world.³⁹ As James Edwards explains, “The inbreaking of God’s kingdom in Jesus first begins, according to Mark, not in the human arena but in the cosmic arena, in order to bind the ‘strong man’ (3:27) who exercises power over the natural order.”⁴⁰

Why would the demon ask the question in this way? Why would it ask, “Have you come to destroy us?” Why would it not ask, “Have you come to challenge us?” Its question belies that it already knows the inevitable outcome of the struggle. The Old

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 50.

³⁹Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 56-57. He writes, “Beginning with this story (see also 3:7-12; 5:1-20), the exorcisms in Mark depict the gripping conflict between the kingdom of God and the dominion of Satan, between the one anointed with God’s Spirit and those held captive by unclean spirits.”

⁴⁰Ibid. So too Brooks, *Mark*, 52, and Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 57.

Testament prophets had long spoke of a figure that would come and crush the head of the house of wickedness. One such text is Habakkuk's song of praise to Yahweh in Habakkuk 3:2-19. In verse 13, Habakkuk writes, "You went forth for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You struck the head of the house of evil to lay him open from thigh to neck." Habakkuk pictures God bringing salvation to his people by striking "the head of the house of evil," thus bringing ruin to the entire house and accomplishing salvation for his people.

O. Palmer Robertson, commenting on this verse, writes,

So the prophet envisions a *household of the wicked* which has a *chief* established for the purpose of leading this household in its opposition to the people of God and the Lord's redemptive purposes. This *chief* is the prime object of the Lord's offensive. God crushes this principal leader of the throngs of the wicked (v. 14) in the same way in which the star of Jacob was to smite the corners of Moab (Num 24:17) and Jael smote Sisera (Judg 5:26) and Messiah would smite through the head of many (Psa 110:5-6) [emphasis original].⁴¹

The demonic world was aware that God had promised such a crushing destruction and this unclean spirit now asks if Jesus has come to fulfill this purpose.⁴² Even though it is trying to put Jesus on the defensive, it admits its own inferiority by the very question it asks. Nevertheless, the unclean spirit continues trying to assert its domain.

The continued pitiful offensive of the demon. After rising up to challenge Jesus' authoritative activity in the synagogue and trying to maintain its own authority by demanding to know Jesus' purpose in coming, the unclean spirit attempts to go on the offensive. The demon cries out, calling Jesus by name and claiming to know who he is. The demon claims to know Jesus' true identity and title and uses this as an attempt to

⁴¹O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 239.

⁴²Richard Patterson offers an extensive list of Old Testament promises that God would deliver his people through crushing his enemies. Richard Patterson, *Nahum Habakkuk Zephaniah: An Exegetical Commentary* (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 225.

gain mastery over him. It is a pitiful attempt at an offensive attack, grasping at the vain idea that declaring the exact name of a person or spirit would grant authority over it.⁴³

However, by the very title that the demon invokes, he concedes that it is up against a superior power. Intriguing is the terminology the unclean spirit uses to give the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, calling him the “Holy One of God” (1:24). What is meant by this title? While there is a potential link with Samson,⁴⁴ at the very least the use of this title is a recognition of and reference to the special relationship Jesus had with God.⁴⁵ Such a special relationship would imply that the demon understood it was overmatched in this encounter. Even in its attempt to gain mastery over Jesus, the unclean spirit reveals that it understands its inferiority and the nature of Jesus’ mission to vanquish the enemies of the kingdom of God. As Marvin Vincent notes, “The demon names him as giving to the destruction the impress of hopeless certainty.”⁴⁶

The outcome of the encounter. Without answering any of the questions posed to him or engaging in a battle of exorcism strategies, Jesus immediately puts an end to the encounter by ordering the demon to be silent and come out of the man. The

⁴³Lane, *Mark*, 74. So too Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 57. This is contra Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 57, R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 104, and Stein, *Mark*, 88, who assert that rather than trying to gain mastery over Jesus by using his name, the demon invokes Jesus’ identity as an admittance that Jesus is his superior. Guelich cites evidence that the use of a name by a demon being exorcised is extremely rare in “supposed parallels” of exorcism literature and on this basis determines that the demon is merely acknowledging Jesus to be its superior. Context, however, suggests that here it is a further attempt, after challenging Jesus’ presence in the synagogue, to gain an advantage over him.

⁴⁴Samson is the only other person in Scripture to be called “the holy one of God.” Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 58. Edwards believes that the connection with Samson is that Samson was seen as the mighty, Spirit-empowered vanquisher of God’s enemies, and this is also the purpose behind Jesus’ mission. Adding to the connection between Jesus and Samson is a similarity in Jesus being “of Nazareth” and Samson’s being under a Nazirite vow (Judges 12:5). Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 57, sees this connection with Samson as the key to understanding the demon’s usage of this title. This is contra Stein, *Mark*, 88-89, who thinks that such a connection between Hebrew words would have been meaningless to Mark’s Greek speaking audience. I think the connection is intriguing but do not think it can be pressed with any certainty.

⁴⁵Stein, *Mark*, 88-89. So too Brooks, *Mark*, 51. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 57, posits that this may be the case but he also holds that there could be more significance as will be discussed below.

⁴⁶Marvin Vincent, *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1888), 1:165.

demon convulses the man and grudgingly obeys Jesus' authoritative command, giving one final cry as it departs. This parting cry is best understood not as rebellion against Jesus' command to silence but rather as an expression of frustrated rage.⁴⁷ Jesus speaks only five words in the Greek text, and the unclean spirit is vanquished and driven from the man. The force of the authority of his words is put on display as he overpowers this spirit who had dominated the entire consciousness of a human being. This Jesus who commands people to repent and believe shows his complete authority over powerful spiritual forces. Who would dare dismiss or disobey him?

Jesus' ministry begins with this marquee victory over Satan and his kingdom. The full impact of the kingdom of God is now clear—it has arrived in the person of Jesus in order to, as William Lane says, “confront Satan and strip him of his power.”⁴⁸ Jesus' authority to command people is validated by his authority to command the spiritual. From this point on in Mark's narrative exorcisms will play a key role, appearing frequently in Mark's summary statements concerning Jesus' ministry (1:39; 3:11-12) and in additional detailed encounters of Jesus exorcising unclean spirits (5:1-20; 7:24-29; 9:14-29). This scene in the Capernaum synagogue will not be an isolated event; Jesus will be expelling the wards of Satan from all over the surrounding region. The authority of Jesus' word that compelled his disciples to leave everything to follow him, the authority that dumbfounded the crowd in the synagogue, extends to the spiritual world and inaugurates the end of the oppression of Satan's kingdom.

The Liberating Impact of Jesus' Authority

While this story demonstrates Jesus' authority over Satan, the fate of the man who had been possessed must not be overlooked. It is true that one consequence of the

⁴⁷Alexander, *Mark*, 22.

⁴⁸Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 75.

exorcism is the blow dealt to Satan's kingdom but another consequence is that a man who had once been a dominated serf within that kingdom has now been set free. James Edwards captures the point powerfully:

Not only are unclean spirits expelled, but broken people are restored to health and wholeness and to the possibility of restoration with their Creator, in whose image they are made. The *exousia* of Jesus is astonishing not as a display of Jesus' grandeur but as a power of redemption for captives.⁴⁹

This story is not just about the defeat of Satan—it is about the extension of God's mercy to those who are held captive within Satan's kingdom.⁵⁰ It is about liberation and rescue. Jesus had just told his disciples that they would engage in a ministry of "fishing" for men (1:17). Here Mark shows the first person in the gospel to be caught up and brought out of the waters of Satan's domain into the safety and security of the shore with Jesus.⁵¹ The work to reclaim the captives has begun with this initial victory over the kingdom of Satan.

Jesus' Authority Granted to His Disciples

This is the beginning of a ministry of liberation that would continue through Jesus' ministry and subsequently through the disciples' own ministry. It was noted earlier that the disciples are present with Jesus during this exorcism and that they themselves would go on to exercise the same authority Jesus does here. Jesus displays an authority here that he then bestows upon his followers. Peter and the others mentioned in 1:16-20 submitted their wills to the authority of Jesus and, on the basis of their obedience, Jesus bestows upon them the right to exercise his authority. The same authority that sets men

⁴⁹Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 58.

⁵⁰Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark*, 155.

⁵¹Interestingly, Jesus gives the command to the demon to be silent. The only other time that this verb appears in Mark's gospel is when Jesus calms the sea in Mark 4:39. Just as the sea is calm and still after Jesus rebukes the angry power of the waves, so also this man is left in peace as the demon who possessed him is silenced and evicted from his body!

free is given to those who will carry on the kingdom advancement once Jesus is gone.

Jonathan Leeman says,

His authority, through our obedience as believers, leads to our authority. Just as Adam should have exercised a God-glorifying dominion by equipping his children to exercise a God-glorifying dominion, so Christ does commission Christians to exercise a Christlike authority. . . . That means they are to heal, give life and not exploit it, preach, evangelize, cast out, bind and loose, teach, render judgment on imposters, care, and make disciples. They are to do these things in all the earth, just as Adam was supposed to. All this they are to do by taking up their crosses and giving themselves entirely to him.⁵²

This authority that is put on display in the Capernaum synagogue is then entrusted to those who had already responded in humble obedience to Jesus' summons. The kingdom authority of Jesus that comes through words is continued in the Satan-binding authority of gospel proclamation through his followers. The liberating authority of the kingdom of God continues in the world both geographically and chronologically through the preaching and ministry of Jesus' followers.

Jesus' Spreading Fame

In light of this display of kingdom authority, the report about Jesus spreads wide and far throughout Galilee (1:28). At the beginning of the gospel, people were flocking to John who told them of one who would come baptizing in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had descended on him and now it is seen what power and authority such a baptism brought. Now that this one has come and has demonstrated this power and authority, the message that began to be heralded by John is now being carried through the whole region.

Summary

This account matches the authority of Jesus' words with the authority of his

⁵²Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 156-57.

actions. The authority that is sensed in his teaching is demonstrated in the exorcism; the authority of the kingdom of God comes in words.⁵³ The crowds make this connection; they are again struck with amazement after the exorcism just as they were when they first heard Jesus' teaching.⁵⁴ They see a link between the authority of Jesus' teaching and the authority used to drive out the demon: "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (1:27).

The crowd saw that the same authority in his teaching that struck them out of their senses was also at work in the exorcism of the demon. Both his word and his work bring the authority of the kingdom of God, an authority that spells the doom of Satan's kingdom and the release of those held captive within it. The kingdom of God has come with an authority that both binds and sets free. Jesus has the authority to constrain men to follow him and make him the center of their lives but this same authority sets them free from the dominion of Satan.

Contemporary Application

Individually, one must understand that God's kingdom in Jesus Christ both binds and liberates. Jesus comes to liberate people from the dominion of Satan and the sin, death, and alienation from God that Satan's kingdom brings. As Paul proclaimed in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses" (Acts 13:38-39). In Jesus, no sin, no sickness, no death, no power of hell nor scheme of man, can hold dominion over those who believe. Jesus has come with an

⁵³Robert Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1996), 143. So too Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 49.

⁵⁴Mark uses a different Greek word here to describe the crowd's amazement than he did in 1:22. There he used a passive form of *ekplēssō*, whereas here he uses the passive of *thambeō*, but the sense is the same.

authority that sets men free.

Yet this word that liberates is also a word that constrains. Jesus speaks in the synagogue with an authority that sets a man free from the dominion of Satan but that same authoritative word also demands obedience and a centering of the life and heart upon God's kingdom. The voice that commands the demon to be quiet and come out of the man is the same voice that commands people to "repent and believe in the gospel." Human beings cannot escape having to serve someone. Bob Dylan was right: "Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody."

If people are to rejoice in Jesus' authority, they must rejoice in both its liberation and its constraint. The former necessarily leads to the latter. Paul says that "having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Rom 6:18). By liberating people from sin God then subjects them to the authority of righteousness.⁵⁵ He says elsewhere that God rescues us from the domain of darkness only to transfer us to the kingdom of His Son (Col 1:13). No one lives in a kingdom where they are master of their own domain. The same word that sets free from Satan's dominion also binds to God's. It is impossible for people to rejoice in the freedom that God brings from Satan, sin, and death without also submitting themselves to his rule, mediated by his word. People have to serve somebody; if they choose to serve sin and Satan it will result in death but obedience to God and his ways of righteousness will bring life (Rom 6:16).

Conclusion

Jesus has come bringing an authority to destroy Satan's kingdom and set free those who were held captive by it, an authority that comes through his spoken word. This authority that liberates from Satan's kingdom also binds to God's kingdom through demanding a life centered on Jesus. This authority continues to be at work in the world

⁵⁵Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 334.

today through the kingdom proclamation of the apostolic church. May those who seek freedom find truly find it through submission to his word.

CHAPTER 7

MARK 1:29-34: THE KINGDOM COMPASSION

On a cold Sunday morning in January I was making my way through the halls of the church with a hundred things on my mind. Another blanket of snow had covered our community in a winter that was marked by a seemingly endless amount of it. I was selfishly thinking about how low attendance would be that morning and struggling to center my heart in the things of the gospel in preparation for worship.

I was jolted out of my internal struggle by Myron Saylor, a longtime faithful deacon in the church, who asked me if we could step into my office to talk. Myron, along with his wife Jackie, had been among the greatest encouragers I had at the church. Myron loved me deeply and he demonstrated it repeatedly with his life. That is what made the news he brought me that morning all the more devastating: he had been to his doctor, he had pancreatic cancer, and he knew he was going to die. Time proved the diagnosis accurate; Myron was gone within the year.

I watched in helpless grief and pain as over the next several months the cancer and its treatment robbed my beloved friend of hair, stature, and strength to live. My visits with him moved from his living room to his bedroom to his hospital room. To his dying day, he retained his smile, his selfless concern for me, and his joy in knowing he would soon see his God face to face. I cannot yet think back to the phone call I received telling me he was gone without a welling of tears.

Since the curse upon Adam, mankind has lived inescapably under the law of death.¹ It invades the physical body in numerous ways throughout life until it finally

¹Athanasius, *On The Incarnation*, trans. a religious of C. S. M. V. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996), 29.

returns it to the dust. Death relentlessly assaults until it achieves final victory over the body.

Jesus came to bring the kingdom of God among mankind with a power that reclaims the physical body from the pervading power of the grave. Jesus' ability to heal the sick was a part of this kingdom power. In Mark 1:29-34, Jesus practically banishes all forms physical oppression from the village of Capernaum in a single evening, demonstrating his complete authority to rescue humanity from sickness. Yet many of his followers today still live under the oppressive hand of physical ailment. How then are Christians to apply Jesus' healing ministry to life today? What truth does this passage provide to anchor the soul in trust toward God when death and sickness extend their withered grasp into earthly existence? The main point of Mark 1:29-34 is not that Christians are to expect immediate healing in sickness. Rather it teaches that Jesus has compassion on suffering and that he came to bring a kingdom that, when it comes in full, will eliminate physical suffering for all time.

Surrounding Context of Mark 1:29-34

This evening of healing is tied both chronologically and geographically with the previous section. Mark narrates that Jesus left the synagogue where he performed the exorcism and immediately entered the home where the next scene takes place.² Mark wants his readers to connect what happened in the synagogue with what happens later that evening in Simon's house. He displays the activity that summarizes Jesus' ministry: teaching, exorcism, and healing. As Joel Marcus explains, "Jesus' battle with an unclean spirit in 1:21-28 is now complemented by his healing of Peter's mother-in-law in 1:29-31, and then the exorcism and healing are generalized in 1:32-34."³

²Robert Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 93.

³Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 27 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 197. There is evidence that Mark intentionally paired the two specific stories together. Robert Gundry

Two themes present in previous sections reappear here. First, Mark emphasizes Jesus' authority. Jesus' miraculous healing of a woman with a fever, along with all different kind of other illnesses, demonstrates his complete authority over sickness.⁴ As Morna Hooker notes, "Once again, [Mark] emphasizes the authority of Jesus, this time by stressing the large number of those who are healed."⁵ Likewise, Mark shows that the exorcism that took place in the synagogue was not unique but characteristic of Jesus' power to overthrow demonic possession wherever he encountered it.⁶ This display of power shows that Jesus is indeed the mighty one who would come after John the Baptist (Mark 1:7).⁷

Second, the theme of discipleship is also present. Mark gives background information that shows some of the implications of discipleship for those Jesus had called in 1:16-20. Jesus called Peter to leave behind his occupation and follow after him. This passage shows to some degree the price that Peter paid to do so. This story mentions Peter's mother-in-law, which means that Peter was married (1 Cor 9:5) and had a household for which he was responsible to provide.⁸ Mark also makes it a point to mention that James and John are still present with Jesus for the night of miraculous healing, which shows that those Jesus called are with him throughout his ministry

writes, "The healing of Simon's mother-in-law also complements the exorcism in vv 21-28: the former had to do with a man, the latter has to do with a woman; the first occurred in public at synagogue, the second occurs in private at home." Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary of His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 86.

⁴R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 106. So too Stein, *Mark*, 95.

⁵Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Continuum, 2006), 71.

⁶Ibid.

⁷C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentaries (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 82.

⁸William Lane, *Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 78.

activity.⁹ The recurring themes of Jesus' powerful authority and his followers' discipleship are present in this section.

Jesus' Displays His Authority Through Healing

Jesus' identity as one with authority (1:22) cannot be separated from his identity as a miraculous healer in Mark's gospel.¹⁰ Mark devotes a larger percentage of his gospel to Jesus' miracles and healings than any other gospel writer, with approximately thirty-one percent of his work devoted either directly or indirectly to the miraculous.¹¹ One of the main ways Jesus displays his authority in Mark is through his mighty acts of healing.

Jesus Displays His Authority in Healing Peter's Mother-in-Law

Immediately after leaving the synagogue, Jesus enters into Peter's home.¹² Here he is told that Peter's mother-in-law is sick with a fever and it is implied that this report serves as a request for Jesus to do something about it. Fevers in the ancient world were seen not as an attendant sign of another illness but as an independent disease itself.¹³ This fever is severe enough that it causes Peter's mother-in-law to be confined to a bed.¹⁴

⁹Gundry, *Mark*, 86.

¹⁰Joel Green, "Healing," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 538.

¹¹Craig Blomberg, "Healing," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 302.

¹²France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 107, notes that Peter's house in Capernaum seems to have been a base from which Jesus operated when he was there (2:1; 3:20; 7:17; 9:28, 33). So too Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 82.

¹³Lane, *Mark*, 77.

¹⁴Stein, *Mark*, 94.

Jesus' ability to heal the fever shows that he acts with authority over it.¹⁵ In Jesus' encounter with the demoniac in the synagogue, the vanquishing of the unclean spirit was full of confrontation, cries, and convulsing. Here Mark shows Jesus simply reaching down toward the person oppressed with sickness and lifting her back to health.¹⁶ Mark does not even record whether or not Jesus said anything.¹⁷ Whereas in the previous story Jesus' authority is demonstrated by his words, here the healing depends solely upon Jesus himself. The emphasis in the story is not on the nature of the illness but rather on Jesus' complete sufficiency to heal.¹⁸

The efficacy of Jesus' healing is immediately apparent. The woman who had previously been confined to her bed is now able not only to stand but also to resume the duties of preparing and serving the evening meal.¹⁹ Jesus had displayed his authority over people by commanding their allegiance (1:16-20), over the demonic kingdom through the exorcism in the synagogue (1:21-28), and now shows that illness also must bow to his will.²⁰

Mark also makes clear that Jesus' authority is of a divine nature. He does so by specifying that it was a *fever* that was healed. In some rabbinic literature, healing a fever was something that only God could do. In comparing the healing of a fever with

¹⁵James Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 52.

¹⁶France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 106-107.

¹⁷Tatum Barnes, "Did Jesus Heal Simon's Mother-in-Law of a Fever?," *Dialogue* 27, no. 4 (1994): 152.

¹⁸James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 60.

¹⁹Stein, *Mark*, 94. So too Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 70.

²⁰"Disease and Healing," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery: An Encyclopedic Exploration of the Images, Symbols, Motifs, Metaphors, Figures of Speech and Literary Patterns of the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 209.

the Old Testament miracle of God preserving Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah from the flaming furnace (Dan 3: 19-27), Rabbi Alexandri writes,

Greater is the miracle wrought for the sick than for Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. [For] that of Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah [concerned] a fire kindled by man, which all can extinguish; whilst that of a sick person is [in connection with] a heavenly fire, and who can extinguish that?²¹

Curing a fever shows that Jesus acts with an authority unavailable to mere human men. He acts with the authority of God.

Jesus Displays His Authority in Healing the Masses

In the evening, after the sun had set, the whole town begins to bring those who are sick and possessed by demons to Jesus. The mention that the sick were brought only after sundown is significant. The Old Testament prohibited carrying burdens, which would certainly include carrying a person, on the Sabbath (Jer 17:21; cf. Num 15:32-36; Neh 13:15-21). As the Jewish Sabbath ended at sundown, the people of Capernaum could lawfully bring their sick and demon-possessed to Jesus “after the sun had set” (1:32).²² Mark tells his readers that “the whole city had gathered at the door” (1:33) which, while almost certainly hyperbolic, emphasizes the citywide notoriety Jesus had gained through his activity at the synagogue.²³

²¹As quoted in David Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 280.

²²Lane, *Mark*, 78-79. So too France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 107. This is contra Stein, *Mark*, 95, who thinks that Mark's Gentile audience would not have thought along such lines. That the people in Capernaum waited until after sunset so as to avoid breaking the Sabbath is, however, a perfectly reasonable conclusion, especially since Mark takes the time to mention it. Joel Marcus notes that controversy concerning the Sabbath is not in view in these stories. The exorcism in the synagogue was clearly Jesus responding to a situation thrust upon him, the mother-in-law healing is done in private, and these healings now are done after sunset. There is no cause for offense concerning Jesus' activity during the Sabbath at this point. See Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 197.

²³Stein, *Mark*, 95. So too Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 65.

Jesus then proceeds to display his divine authority by healing every oppressed person brought to him.²⁴ Mark says that Jesus healed “many who were ill with various diseases” (1:33), which shows that Jesus’ ability to heal was not limited to particular kinds of illnesses. As Robert Stein says, “Jesus was a ‘general practitioner’ and not a specialist.”²⁵

Jesus displays complete authority over all forces that malign humanity, whether spiritual or physical. It is clear that Mark understands that there is a distinction between demonic possession and physical illness as different Greek words describe how Jesus dealt with each of them. Illnesses are healed (*therapeuō*) and demons are cast out (*ekballō*).²⁶ However, even though they are distinguished, they are closely linked together.²⁷ Both are seen as enemies that must be vanquished as God enacts his promises of salvation for his people. As Joel Marcus says, “Both shrieking demons and bodily afflictions are distortions of the divine will that flee at the advent of Jesus.”²⁸ Jesus’ healing of the masses displays his divine authority.

Jesus Displays His Authority in Silencing the Demons

Mark adds a detail to his description of Jesus exorcising the demons. He notes that Jesus “was not permitting the demons to speak” (1:33). How does this add to Mark’s theme of Jesus’ authority in this section? Several scholars see this command to the demons to be silent as a reference to the “messianic secret,” a phrase that describes the

²⁴Some note the difference in Mark’s terminology that the people brought “all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed” and that Jesus healed “many” and cast out “many demons.” R. T. France writes, “The difference between ‘all’ and ‘many’ describing those who were healed is not significant; Mark is not suggesting that all came but only many were healed, he is saying that the all who came were many and they were all healed.” France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 110. So too Stein, *Mark*, 96.

²⁵Stein, *Mark*, 96. So too France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 110.

²⁶Stein, *Mark*, 95. So too France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 109.

²⁷Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 199.

²⁸*Ibid.*

repeated efforts of Jesus in Mark's gospel to forbid both demons and people to make his identity and deeds known.²⁹ While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to give a full discussion of this phenomenon in Mark's gospel, the "messianic secret" does need to be briefly explained to determine the significance of Jesus' silencing of the demons in this text.

Robert Stein notes how "on numerous occasions those delivered from demons (1:32; 3:12), those healed of their diseases (1:44; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26), and the disciples themselves (8:30; 9:9) are commanded not to tell others of what Jesus had done for them or who he is."³⁰ There is repeated effort on Jesus' part to suppress public proclamation of his identity and deeds. Some of the explanations commonly given for this are: 1) Jesus wanted to avoid confrontation with Roman and Jewish officials before the appointed time of his crucifixion. An open declaration of his identity as Messiah would have certainly brought confrontation;³¹ 2) Any understanding of Jesus' messiahship prior to his death upon a cross is premature and incomplete; thus Jesus seeks to squelch his identity before the time of his crucifixion;³² 3) A wide proclamation of Jesus' identity and healing miracles would bring mobs of people seeking the miraculous and this would impede Jesus' movement around Galilee; thus he sought to downplay any public declaration of these things.³³

²⁹France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 110; Stein, *Mark*, 96; Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 62; Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 67; George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 179. All of these scholars see in this text a reference to the "messianic secret."

³⁰Stein, *Mark*, 96-97.

³¹Ibid.

³²Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 62. So too Craig Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 119.

³³Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 77-78. There are other explanations given but these are the ones that occurred most frequently in the sources I researched.

David Garland argues, however, that all of the commands to silence to demons, those healed, and the disciples should not be lumped together under one heading of “messianic secret” and treated like they all have the same purpose and function in the narrative.³⁴ He asserts,

The commands to demons differ from the commands to the disciples (8:29-30; 9:9), differ in their intent, and express dissimilar theological motifs. Silencing the demons, those who are healed, and the disciples should be dealt with separately to recognize how they convey distinct theological themes.³⁵

If the context surrounding 1:29-34 is examined, Jesus had already silenced the demons from proclaiming who he was in the previous pericope. In 1:25, Jesus told the demons to be silent because they were trying to assert Jesus’ identity in an attempt to gain mastery over him. Jesus silences them to deny this defensive tactic, which hastens their departure from the possessed. By not allowing them to speak Jesus is denying them their attempt at self-defense and resist Jesus’ authority over them. As Robert Gundry explains, “Again, his power crushes the attempt to gain control over his actions by uttering knowledge of him.”³⁶ Jesus’ command to silence displays their forced subjugation and defeat before him.

Rikki Watts also points out how connections between Mark and Isaiah, already explicit throughout Mark’s opening chapter (Mark 1:2-3), strengthens this argument. Watts argues that Isaiah 52:15 describes how Israel’s enemies are forced to be silent as they understand the significance of Yahweh’s actions (cf. Psa 107:42).³⁷ The silence of the demons before Jesus reflects the silence of Israel’s enemies before the supreme power

³⁴Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel*, 371-72. He writes, “[The commands to silence] should be interpreted under separate categories and should not be forced to fit into some imagined coherent theological straitjacket.”

³⁵Garland, *A Theology of Mark’s Gospel*, 371-72.

³⁶Gundry, *Mark*, 88.

³⁷Rikki Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 169.

and authority of God himself. Thus Jesus' silencing of the demons serves in this story to highlight Jesus' supreme authority over all enemy powers.

Thus, since disciples and those who are healed cannot rightly be called Jesus' "enemies" throughout the gospel, it is clear that all the commands to silence in Mark's gospel should not be lumped into one category called a "messianic secret" and treated as the same. The explanations offered above for the "messianic secret" could very well explain why Jesus tries to suppress news about his identity and deeds among those he heals and his disciples but they do not adequately explain why he commands the demons to silence. Jesus commands the demons to silence because doing so displays his complete authority and victory over them, refusing them a defensive tactic and hastening their expulsion from those they possess.

Summary

The kingdom of God comes with an authority that frees people from the oppression of the demonic and physical ailment. Mark gives his readers a specific example of Jesus' authority over the demonic in 1:21-28, followed by a specific example of his authority over physical illness in 1:29-31. The subsequent description of Jesus healing all the demon-possessed and all the physically ill in Capernaum show that these specific incidents are not unique but rather exemplary of his universal authority over both.³⁸ Jesus also continues to show ultimate authority and supremacy over the demonic through silencing their defensive attempts to stave him off. Jesus arrives with an authority to set people free from all oppression, both physical and spiritual.

³⁸Stein, *Mark*, 97.

Jesus' Healing Is a Further Sign of the Arrival of God's Promised Kingdom

Jesus' healing ministry in Mark 1:29-34 gives further evidence that God's kingdom of salvation has come near.³⁹ Mark's entire first chapter thus far has been crafted to make this unmistakable point. The gospel opens with an announcement that Mark is telling his readers about "the gospel," which is the news of "the inbreaking of God's final saving act."⁴⁰ Mark then quotes Exodus 23:20, Malachi 3:1, and Isaiah 40:3, which speak about the advent of a herald who will precede God's victorious activity on behalf of his people. Next, the supernatural acts and the content of God's declaration from heaven that accompany Jesus' baptism make clear that his arrival signals the inauguration of God's promised kingdom of salvation.⁴¹ Jesus then arrives announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God's salvation and subsequently enlists a group of followers to "fish" for people to escape divine judgment and find salvation in this kingdom. He then casts a demon out of a man to show that the kingdom of God comes with an authority that overpowers and expels the forces of evil, setting free those who have been held captive under their sway.⁴²

Jesus' healing ministry continues the theme of the arrival of God's kingdom. The Old Testament also promised that the one who would usher in God's kingdom of salvation would physically heal the people. Isaiah declared that the day of God's eschatological salvation would be a day when "the deaf will hear the words of a book, and out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see" (Isa 29:18). He also announced that when God's salvation broke upon men the "eyes of the blind will be

³⁹Green, "Healing," 538.

⁴⁰Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 24.

⁴¹James Edwards, "The Baptism of Jesus According to the Gospel of Mark," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30, no. 1 (March 1991): 43.

⁴²Graham Twelftree, "Spiritual Powers," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, et al. (Downer Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 200), 798.

opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped” and “the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute will shout for joy” (Isa 35:5-6). Isaiah said that when God sent his servant, endowed with the power of his Spirit, then this servant would “open blind eyes” (Isa 42:7).⁴³ As Robert Stein explains, “The miracles bear a Christological meaning. . . . The Messiah is portrayed as one who would heal the sick, give sight to the blind, raise the dead, free the prisoners, and proclaim good news to the meek.”⁴⁴ Craig Blomberg captures the point in saying, “When one studies all of the miracles [of healing] of the Gospels, it becomes clear that their predominant purpose is to demonstrate the inauguration of the kingdom of God in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah.”⁴⁵

Healing demonstrates the coming of God’s salvation because God himself is portrayed as Israel’s healer throughout the Old Testament.⁴⁶ God declared to Israel that he was the one who healed them (Exod 15:26). God himself is the one who removes sickness from among the people (Exod 23:25), the one who restores those on their sickbed to health (Psa 41:3), and the one who is able to heal his people from any disease with which they may be afflicted (Psa 103:3). Jesus, then, as he arrives and is able to restore to health those who “were ill with various diseases” (Mark 1:34), acts “as the authorized agent of Yahweh’s healing beneficence.”⁴⁷

⁴³There is also evidence that some Jewish rabbis understood these texts to say that the Messiah would be one who would come with universal ability to heal. R. E. O. White writes, “There is rabbinic evidence that some were looking for a Messiah who would heal the world’s sickness. The Talmud later preserves among ‘signs of the Messiah’ the portrait of ‘one in the midst of the suffering poor . . . tending their wounds,’” in R. E. O. White, “Heal, Health,” in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 328.

⁴⁴Stein, *Mark*, 97.

⁴⁵Blomberg, “Healing,” 301.

⁴⁶Green, “Healing,” 536.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 540.

Summary

Jesus' healing ministry adds to the unified witness of Mark's first chapter that he has come to bring the kingdom of God's promised salvation to God's people. Jesus declared that God's kingdom had come near with his arrival and then acts with God's unique ability to heal all diseases, demonstrating that God's end-time rule has arrived.⁴⁸ As Blomberg again summarizes, "[The miracles of healing] supported his teaching that the kingdom of God was arriving with his ministry and that he himself was God's unique Son."⁴⁹

Contemporary Application

Jesus arrives with the authority of God's kingdom to set people free from all physical oppression. How then does this truth come to the aid of those who wrestle with the devastating effects of physical illness in their lives now? This text teaches that God's people are to entrust themselves to the compassion of Jesus and to fix their hope on the day that Jesus will bring the inaugurated kingdom to its final consummation. It is tempting for those wrestling with the excruciating pain that sickness and death can bring to cry out, "Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here!" (Luke 4:23). Jesus' universal ability to heal demonstrated in this passage causes people to long for the same death-dispelling touch to be issued for them and their loved ones as well. This story, however, is not intended to teach its readers to expect immediate healing in their time of sickness but rather to encourage them to entrust themselves to Jesus' compassion and the future consummation of the kingdom.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Blomberg, "Healing," 299.

Jesus' Healing Displays His Compassion

Jesus' healing ministry in this text demonstrates his compassion on human suffering. Jesus did not enter the world to be entertained by kings in palaces; he entered the world to live among ordinary people in their ordinary suffering. Jesus' evening in Capernaum healing all who came to him shows that "the nature of God's kingdom [is] health-giving, down-to-earth, and relevant to the daily problems of the whole person."⁵⁰ As R. E. O. White explains, "Christ's healing ministry was sufficient evidence that the king had come, and that the kingdom of God was gracious and kind."⁵¹ There are two details in this story that highlight Jesus' compassion.

First, Jesus' compassion is shown in that this story describes the healing of a woman. Mark first displays the healing power of the kingdom not on behalf of men of importance or the governors and rulers of the town. He instead displays it on the nameless mother-in-law of a fisherman in Galilee. Jesus' healing ministry was directed toward those who were ordinary, even those who were most likely undervalued in society, as women of the time were.⁵² As James Brooks explains, "By including accounts of the healing of women as well as men, Mark implied that Jesus was concerned about all people, including those who had a lowly place in society."⁵³

Second, Jesus' manner of healing Peter's mother-in-law displays his compassion. Jesus tenderly reaches down, takes the woman by the hand, and raises her up. Other healing miracles in Mark's gospel show that physical touch was not necessary for Jesus to employ his power of restoration (Mark 2:1-12; 3:1-6; 7:24-30). Why then does Jesus do so here? Joel Green explains,

⁵⁰White, "Heal, Health," 329.

⁵¹Ibid., 328.

⁵²Ibid., 329.

⁵³Brooks, *Mark*, 52.

Jesus often healed merely by pronouncement, but the Gospel writers also mention his laying on of hands or touching the sick in the contexts of his healing. This was a boundary-crossing *gesture of compassion* which reflects the extension of God's own 'hand' which acts in creation and deliverance in the OT⁵⁴ and so signifies the power of God at work in and through Jesus [emphasis mine].⁵⁴

The physical touch established tenderness and a visible physical connection between Jesus and the person healed.⁵⁵ While he could sometimes display his complete authority by merely commanding sickness or demons to leave (1:25; 2:11; 3:5), he could also demonstrate his compassion by combining his power to heal with a tender physical touch (5:41; 7:33; 8:22-26).

In both whom he healed and how he healed her, Jesus shows that he has compassion on all who suffer. Those who are struggling with sickness and death can know that their pain does not escape his compassionate eye. Though the healing may not come in the same immediate sense as they did in Jesus' earthly ministry, those who suffer can know that their tears do not fall unnoticed before God (Psa 56:8). They should entrust themselves to the one who has displayed such compassion and know that he is still the God who promises to heal them.

Jesus' Healing Is Only a Picture of the Full Arrival of the Kingdom

If Jesus has such compassion on his people, why does he not extend his hand to heal in the same way that he does in Mark 1:29-34? If it is known that Jesus *can* heal by the authority of the kingdom and that he *has compassion* on those who suffer, why then does he not heal? Here it must be understood that Jesus came to *inaugurate* the kingdom of God's salvation but he did not come in his first advent to bring the *full consummation* of this kingdom.

⁵⁴Green, "Healing," 538.

⁵⁵J. A. Alexander, *Mark*, The Geneva Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 24.

The old creation, corrupted by the curse brought by Adam's rebellion, is characterized by disease and death. Jesus came to show that the new creation he came to bring would be free of these things. However, one must understand that Jesus is merely giving a foretaste of what the consummated kingdom would be like. That consummation has not yet come. As Thomas Schreiner explains,

Of course, the new world had not yet arrived in its fullness, for death, demons, blindness, and deafness were not eliminated completely. There was an 'already but not yet' dimension to Jesus' ministry. The kingdom had come in his person and ministry but it was not yet consummated. The kingdom had not arrived in all its fullness.⁵⁶

Jesus did not come to open up universal healing for all who would come to him. He came to display that the kingdom would be marked by a freedom from those things when it came in its fullness.

The miracles of healing, in a sense, are like billboards along the highway leading up to Disney World.⁵⁷ The billboards show children and parents enjoying the amusement park's rides, interacting with Disney characters, and basking in the joy the park affords. They create excitement and anticipation to those cramped inside their vehicles for what is waiting for them when they finally arrive. The billboards reinforce that there is indeed a Magic Kingdom and shows forth what is awaiting those who make it there. Jesus' miracles of healing function in much the same way. As C. E. B. Cranfield writes, "The miracles are not only signs of the kingdom of God in the sense that the fact of their occurrence is evidence of its presence; they are also signs of it in the sense that they are eloquent symbols of it, picturing it forth."⁵⁸

⁵⁶Thomas Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 458.

⁵⁷A similar illustration that inspired my thinking on this point appears in Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 166-67, though Vickers is using it to make a different point.

⁵⁸Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 84-85.

The miracles give strength and vigor to the resolve of God's people to "fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:13). Though sickness and death may ravish existence up to the present day, when Jesus returns a second time to consummate what he inaugurated with his first advent, what happened in the tiny village of Capernaum will be the universal experience for all who have repented and believed in the gospel (Mark 1:15).

Conclusion

Jesus inaugurates the kingdom of God with a power to heal people from all physical oppression. The healings in Capernaum put forth a snapshot of what this kingdom will be like in its final consummation, which awaits a second advent of the resurrected Jesus. While God's people await that day, they are to rest in the knowledge of Jesus' compassion for them. They are to trust in faith that the consummation of the kingdom will bring the universal experience of healing to those who come to him in faith and repentance. Thus they are to fix their hope completely on the day when Jesus' compassion will reach its full expression in the kingdom's consummation at his second coming. Maranatha!

CHAPTER 8

MARK 1:35-39: THE KINGDOM PRIORITY

A book was released several years ago that claims to take a “uniquely passionate brand of motivational writing to a new level and [lay] out a faith-based program to get your whole life in shape with Jesus as your personal trainer.”¹ The steps shared in this book promise to show “how to get [your] life in high gear, at home as well as at work” so that its readers will not “be left in the stands just watching the game of life when [they] can become the star pitcher, the starting quarterback, [the] team’s most valuable player.” People should be the star of whatever it is that they are doing and Jesus is the one that can help them get there.

The message here is clear: Jesus’ main goal is to serve people like a life coach, helping them, prospering them, making them the star, and transforming their lives into being more successful than others around them. Jesus loves people, this they know—therefore is it not clear that his main goal is to make them happy, successful, and self-confident in their desired life goals? This is how most of modern western culture defines love. The claim is that if someone loves another person, they will make them feel “all that I can be, hardworking, creative, full of life, intellectually edified, spiritually edified, like a hero, empowered, built up, great!”² It appears, at least from this author’s perspective, that Jesus’ main goal is to help people achieve *their* main goals.

¹“Jesus, Life Coach: Learn from the Best,” Amazon.com: Books, accessed December 19, 2016, https://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Life-Coach-Learn-Best/dp/0785287833/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1482196206&sr=8-1&keywords=Jesus+life+coach. This is taken from the book description located on that page.

²Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 48.

How then does one square this idea with Jesus' actions in Mark 1:35-39? In the verses immediately preceding this text, Mark tells of how Jesus spends an entire evening healing and restoring everyone who came to him. Imagine the joy that must have flowed through the streets of Capernaum that night! Friends, family, and loved ones that had been plagued by illness and demonic oppression were liberated en masse in a matter of hours. Talk about a life coach—and with unrivaled power to make sure that nothing held anyone down! Yet when the crowd intently searches for Jesus the next morning, presumably because there are more who have come to him to benefit from his miraculous powers to heal, Jesus decides to leave.

Mark 1:35-39 teaches that Jesus conducted his ministry according to a plan that was not dictated by the desires of human beings. Jesus' main purpose was to announce the arrival of God's kingdom to those who needed to hear it. If one thinks that Jesus' kingdom objective is to help them achieve their goals by always making their lives more prosperous and less confusing, then they will miss the Jesus that the gospels portray. Jesus based his ministry on a prayerful pursuit of proclaiming God's kingdom where it had not yet been proclaimed and those who follow him must endeavor to do the same.

Surrounding Context of Mark 1:35-39

This text is tied inseparably to the verses that immediately precede it. The search for Jesus by the masses in verses 36-37 is no doubt connected to his miraculous display of healing in Capernaum the night before.³ In fact, everything that takes place from verses 21-39 is presented as one continuous sequence of events. Verses 35-39 serve as the conclusion of a description of one day in Jesus' life that began at verse 21.⁴ The

³William Lane, *Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 80.

⁴R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 111.

events of verses 21-38 are typical of the regular activity of Jesus' ministry—Jesus' public ministry is mainly composed of teaching, casting out demons, and healing various diseases.⁵

The theme of the disciples' training for future ministry must also be kept in mind here. Verses 16-20 showed that Jesus' disciples were to join with him in the work of bringing people into the kingdom. The summary in verse 39 describes Jesus' primary activity as preaching and driving out demons, which is precisely the purpose for sending out the twelve apostles given in 3:13-18. The priority of pushing back Satan's dominion through announcing the arrival of the kingdom in authoritative teaching and casting out demons is to be duplicated in the ministry of the disciples. Jesus' agenda for ministry is to be echoed in the lives of his followers.

Jesus Defines His Ministry by the Father's Will

At the close of the events described in verses 21-34, Jesus' popularity in Capernaum had reached a fever pitch. After a mighty display of authority in the synagogue through teaching and exorcising a demon-possessed man, Jesus then spent the remainder of the evening demonstrating his universal power to heal. Consequently, the next morning Peter and his companions are in a frantic search to find Jesus because "everyone is looking" for him (1:37). It is almost certain that the reason for this pursuit is the crowds' desire to see more of the miraculous.⁶ Jesus and his miraculous powers have become well known and in the morning a fresh drove of those seeking him have arrived.

Yet, in spite of this growing popularity, Jesus decides to leave Capernaum to go elsewhere. Mark demonstrates that Jesus' decision to leave the popular acclaim of Capernaum is made in accordance with God's will for his ministry. Prior to his decision

⁵Robert Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 70.

⁶France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 112.

to leave Capernaum, Jesus is shown removing himself from the clamor of the crowds to engage in early morning, solitary prayer. The implication is that his decision to leave is made in accordance with this prayer.

Jesus Leaves the Crowds to Seek His Father

After a night of great popularity, Jesus' primary desire at the start of the next day is to seek his Father in prayer. Fixing the heart to seek God in the morning is a mark of humble dependence and delight in God.⁷ Mark carefully notes that Jesus rises up very early, some time between 3:00 and 6:00 am.⁸ This early wake-up was likely necessary in order to escape being seen and followed by the crowds.⁹ Jesus arises to pray at a time when he will be able to engage in uninterrupted communion with the Father.

In addition to praying at a time early enough to avoid detection, Jesus also sought out a place that was deserted, away from well-traveled areas. Mark notes Jesus' retreat to a "secluded place" (Greek *erēmon topon*) in verse 35 to communicate that Jesus sought out a place where he could commune with God without the interruption of the crowds. Robert Guelich notes that the phrase "secluded place" occurs five times in three different contexts in the gospel (1:35-38; 1:40-45; 6:31-32). He shows that in both of the other two occurrences in the gospel it is clear that Jesus is seeking to avoid the crowds.¹⁰ In 1:40-45, Jesus escapes out into deserted places because his propensity to draw crowds made ministry within cities impossible. In 6:31-32, Jesus calls the disciples out to a deserted place away from the crowds after their missionary efforts in order to seek out a

⁷Robert Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 100. Cf. Psalm 5:3; 59:16; 88:13; 143:8.

⁸Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 27 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 201-202.

⁹France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 111.

¹⁰Guelich, *Mark 1-8:29*, 69.

period of rest. Thus it is likely that this is the sense here as well. The description of Jesus going to a secluded place to pray demonstrates Jesus' desire to remove himself from the crowds.¹¹

By narrating that Jesus arose at a time when few would be awake and that he sought out a place where he would not be interrupted, Mark emphasizes that Jesus sought out communion with the Father. By doing so, Mark shows that Jesus' decision to leave Capernaum flowed out of his intentional pursuit of God.

Jesus Prays to Seek Direction

The purpose of this time of prayer is to seek direction at a point of decision in Jesus' ministry. Jesus is only shown praying in Mark three different times (1:35-38; 6:46; 14:32-42) and an examination of those contexts shows that each episode of prayer came at a critical juncture in Jesus' ministry.¹² David Garland notes that Mark always shows Jesus praying "alone, at night, and at times of tension."¹³ Here, the issue at hand is the definition of his ministry.¹⁴ He has seen great success and popularity in Capernaum—what should be his next move? Jesus retreats to a remote place to pray to seek guidance and to align his will to the Father's will for his ministry.¹⁵

¹¹This is also demonstrated in many of the English translations of these passages. The NASB, ESV, NIV, HCSB, and KJV all translate the occurrences of *erēmos* in 1:3, 4, 12, and 13 as "wilderness," and all of them use other words and phrases besides "wilderness" to translate *erēmos topos* in 1:35, 1:45, and 6:31-32.

¹²James Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 53. He writes that prayer always accompanies times when "Jesus was tempted to take an easy way rather than that of suffering and death." Here Jesus is tempted to chase the popularity of Capernaum rather than adopt the lifestyle of an itinerant preacher. In 6:45-47, Jesus also seeks the Father after the feeding of the 5,000, which John reports was an instance where those fed wanted to take Jesus and make him king (John 6:1-15). 14:32-42 is Jesus' determination to accept the Father's path of suffering for him.

¹³David Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 108.

¹⁴Lane, *Mark*, 81.

¹⁵Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Continuum, 2006), 76.

Mark makes clear that Jesus' retreat to the wilderness to pray was not a brief check-in with the Father. The verb Mark uses to describe Jesus praying is in the imperfect tense, which suggests that Jesus was in prayer for a prolonged period of time.¹⁶ Jesus arose early in the morning not only to escape the attention of the crowds but also to leave adequate time to immerse himself in a season of prayer. It was out of this intentional, durative pursuit of the Father in prayer that Jesus was able to clarify his next steps in ministry.

Summary

All of these details Mark includes to describe Jesus' early morning retreat for prayer show that Jesus' decision to leave the popularity he received in Capernaum was in accordance with God's will. Jesus' ministry activity is in accordance with the divine guidance he received through prayer.¹⁷

The Crowds and Disciples Seek to Control Jesus

As Jesus is praying in a secluded place, a search party led by Peter seeks to find him. The encounter that ensues between Jesus and this search party shows that the crowds and the disciples sought to bend Jesus' ministry agenda to their own desires and understanding. The crowds sought to reduce Jesus' ministry primarily to one of healing physical diseases and the disciples thought that gaining popularity and a large following were the hallmarks of ministry success.

The Crowds Want to Reduce Jesus' Ministry to Healing

Jesus had great popularity in Capernaum but it was not a positive popularity. Peter tells Jesus when he finds him praying in the wilderness, "Everyone is looking for

¹⁶Brooks, *Mark*, 53. Also Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 69.

¹⁷Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 203.

you!” (1:37). The verb Mark uses to describe the crowd’s pursuit (Greek *zēteō*) shows that he views this pursuit in a negative sense.¹⁸ *Zēteō* occurs nine other times in Mark’s gospel and eight of those instances indicate a hostile pursuit of Jesus.¹⁹ Five references describe the religious leaders seeking to put Jesus to death (11:18; 12:12; 14:1, 11, 55). One instance describes Jesus’ family seeking to control him because they thought he was crazy (3:20-21, 31-32) and two other instances occur when the Pharisees seek to test Jesus by asking for a sign (8:11-13).²⁰ As James Edwards explains, “Seeking connotes an attempt to determine and control rather than to submit and follow.”²¹

William Lane says, “The people come to Jesus, not because they recognized his dignity and function but because it is rumored that a miracle worker has come in their midst. Jesus had come to preach repentance and the nearness of the kingdom but the people think only of relief from pain and affliction.”²² The people of Capernaum wanted Jesus because he relieved them from suffering but they had no desire to heed his call to repent, believe the gospel, and center their lives around him.²³ In Matthew 11:23-24, Jesus implies that Capernaum did not repent despite the miraculous events that took place in its midst. Their pursuit of him shows that they wanted to control him by keeping him in Capernaum for their own benefit, but they had no desire to respond positively to his

¹⁸Brooks, *Mark*, 53-54.

¹⁹James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 67.

²⁰The last occurrence of the word is in 16:6, when the angel notes that the women who have come to the tomb are seeking Jesus. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 67, says that all ten of the occurrences of *zēteō* occur in a hostile sense but it is difficult to see how 16:6 describes a hostile pursuit of Jesus.

²¹*Ibid.* Contra Stein, *Mark*, 101. He writes, “On the contrary, Mark emphasizes that Jesus’ ministry in Capernaum was highly successful, and there is no hint that Jesus left Capernaum because of such responses as found in John 6:15 (they wanted to make Jesus a king forcibly) and 6:26 (they possessed a crass interpretation of what his miracles signified.” I would disagree that “there is no hint” that Jesus left because of the misguided pursuit of the crowd, as the examination of Mark’s usage of *zēteō* above demonstrates.

²²Lane, *Mark*, 80.

²³Brooks, *Mark*, 53-54.

teaching.²⁴ They flock to Jesus out of need more so than spiritual recognition of who he is and a desire to be a part of the kingdom he has come to announce.²⁵

The Disciples Want Jesus to Seek Popularity

As the crowds are seeking for Jesus to benefit from his supernatural power, Peter and his companions embark on a mission to locate him.²⁶ When they find him, they inform him that that crowd is looking for him: “Everyone is looking for you!” (1:37). This, however, is not a simple report of the crowd’s pursuit. As William Lane says, “There is a note of reproach in the statement, ‘All are seeking for you,’ which means, ‘What are you doing here when you should be in the midst of the multitude who are clamoring for you?’”²⁷

The disciples offer a mild rebuke to Jesus’ decision to avoid the crowds to spend time praying, thinking that he should be among the people, capitalizing on his popularity.²⁸ As David Garland notes, “The disciples have decided that this great miracle worker is missing a golden opportunity to build up his following. They want to extend

²⁴Jack Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 21. Kingsbury notes that the crowd plays an interesting role in Mark’s gospel. They are not outright enemies of Jesus who wish to silence him and do him harm like the religious leaders, but they are also not like the disciples in that they do not decide to follow and center their lives around him. Their desire to control Jesus is not intentionally hostile but rather it is out of a desire to see the miraculous and benefit from it.

²⁵Ira Driggers, *Following God through Mark: Theological Tension in the Second Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 40.

²⁶France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 112, notes that the phrase “Simon and his companions” indicates Peter’s already early position of leadership among the disciples.

²⁷Lane, *Mark*, 82.

²⁸Some scholars do not see any rebuke in Peter and his companions’ search for Jesus. Stein, *Mark*, 102-3, believes that Mark records the pursuit of Jesus by the crowds and the disciples as merely a description of the great popularity Jesus enjoyed in Capernaum. So also Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 69, and C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 89. Guelich mentions only that their pursuit demonstrated urgency without any hint of rebuke. Given, however, the negative connotations of *zēteō* discussed above along with the equally negative use of *katadiōkō* that will be discussed below, I am more persuaded that Mark intends his readers to understand the search party’s interaction with Jesus as negative.

the previous day's triumphs that will add to Jesus' fame."²⁹ Their insinuation that he should be among the crowds implies that they believe Jesus has misunderstood his own purpose for coming.³⁰

The terminology Mark uses to describe the disciples' search for Jesus implies their disapproval of his retreat into a secluded place. Just as Mark's use of *zēteō* to describe the crowd's pursuit of Jesus indicated a negative connotation, so also is the case with the disciples. Mark uses the verb *katediōxen* to describe Peter and his companion's search for Jesus. While this is the only occurrence of this verb in the New Testament, Joel Marcus explains that the verb *katadiōkō* is almost always used in a hostile sense in extra-biblical literature.³¹ J. A. Alexander notes that one author uses it to "signify the close pursuit of an enemy of war."³² The word carries the sense of hunting someone down.³³ Peter and his companions track Jesus down in an attempt to bring him back in line with their understanding of his ministry.

The disciples are zealous for Jesus' popularity, no doubt in a well-intentioned desire to see his ministry be successful. They, however, are not in tune with Jesus' ministry priorities.³⁴ Peter's report to Jesus that everyone is looking for him suggests that Peter believes Jesus should determine his program for ministry based on the desire of the crowd.³⁵ Peter and his companions believe that Jesus' popularity with the crowd was the

²⁹Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel*, 416.

³⁰Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 75.

³¹Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 202. He writes, "Jesus had called them to fish for men but they are hunting him down!"

³²J. A. Alexander, *Mark*, The Geneva Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 27.

³³Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel*, 416. He writes, "The Greek verb that describes the search for [Jesus] by Simon and his companions is stronger than the NIV translation. It means they 'pursued' or 'hunted him down.'"

³⁴*Ibid.*, 408.

³⁵Alexander, *Mark*, 27.

definition of success for his ministry. Thus they track him down in order to bring him back in line with their definition of success.

Summary

Both the crowds and the disciples present a potential definition of Jesus' ministry. The crowds want to reduce him to a life as a miracle worker who acts on their behalf and Jesus' disciples want him to capitalize on his great popularity. Jesus can no doubt increase his popularity if he stays in Capernaum healing and setting people free from affliction. The disciples rebuke Jesus for seeking the Father's will when he could be among the people appeasing their requests and raising his profile. Mark implies that the clamoring of the crowd and his disciples is an attempt, however well intentioned, to control Jesus' ministry.

Jesus Acts Decisively According to the Father's Will

Jesus pursues the Father's guidance for ministry and then is confronted with a possible direction that is defined by satisfying the desires of the crowd and increasing his popularity. This confrontation between Jesus and those looking for him leads to the climax of the passage.³⁶ Jesus refuses to be conformed to the desires and well-intentioned misunderstanding of the crowds and his disciples. Jesus announces his next phase of ministry decisively, aligning his decision with the purpose of his coming, not the will of the masses. He has come into the world for a specific purpose and his activity must align with that purpose. He must leave Capernaum and preach in places where the news of the kingdom has not yet been heard, pushing back the kingdom of Satan through the power of the kingdom of God.

³⁶Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 203.

Jesus Acts in Accordance with the Divine Purpose

Jesus decides to leave Capernaum in order to preach in other towns because “this is what I came for” (1:38). He had come with a defined purpose, which his morning of prayer implies was strengthened and ratified through communion with the Father, and it was to preach the coming of the kingdom across an extended area.³⁷ God had sent Jesus forth to announce the arrival of the kingdom to all who needed to hear throughout the land of Israel and it would be a deviation from that plan to set up a base of operations in one location.

Jesus Focused on the Battle between God’s Kingdom and Satan’s Kingdom

Jesus announces that his primary purpose is to preach (1:38). This must be seen in light of the content of the description of his ministry 1:14-15: “Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, *preaching* the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’ [emphasis mine].”³⁸ Jesus arrived for the primary purpose of proclaiming the arrival of the kingdom of God and calling people to repentance and faith, not to perform healings and put the miraculous on display. As William Lane says, “His purpose is not to heal as many people as possible as a manifestation of the kingdom of God drawn near in his person, but to confront men with the demand for decision in the perspective of God’s absolute claim upon their person.”³⁹

Healing was an important attendant sign of the kingdom but Jesus’ primary purpose was not to heal.⁴⁰ Mark implicitly makes this point in the summary of Jesus’

³⁷Lane, *Mark*, 82.

³⁸Stein, *Mark*, 102.

³⁹Lane, *Mark*, 82.

⁴⁰France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 109, writes, “It is perhaps worth noting that here, and throughout the gospel, we have no indication that Jesus himself went out looking for patients. The language is always of their either being brought to him or taking the initiative in approaching him themselves. He

ministry in the nearby towns. Mark writes, “And he went into their synagogues throughout all Galilee, preaching and casting out demons” (1:39). Noticeably absent is any reference to healing. Why would Mark include exorcism in this summary but leave out any mention of healing, which Jesus undoubtedly still performed?⁴¹ Robert Stein explains, “The mention of Jesus’ driving out demons in 1:39, however, emphasizes the defeat of the demonic power and thus the arrival of the kingdom of God even better than Jesus’ healing ministry.”⁴² Jesus’ ministry of exorcism displays the reality of his announcement of God’s kingdom more graphically than a ministry of healing.⁴³ In light of the clamoring of the Capernaum crowd for healing, Mark drops it from his summary and highlights Jesus’ power to exorcise demons as the attending sign of his kingdom announcement.

The exorcism of demons shows that the primary purpose of the presence and power of God’s kingdom in the person of Jesus is to drive out the kingdom of Satan. While healing shows Jesus’ compassion and the release of individuals from suffering, it does not demonstrate the defeat of Satan’s kingdom like exorcism.⁴⁴ For Mark, preaching the kingdom and pushing back Satan’s kingdom through exorcism are inseparably connected.⁴⁵

was not engaged in a ‘healing campaign;’ healing and exorcism, important as they were in his total ministry, arose not so much by design as from a natural response to need as he encountered it, boosted by people’s desire to benefit from his unique ἐξουσία.”

⁴¹The rest of the gospel narrative shows that healing remained a large part of Jesus’ activity throughout his public ministry.

⁴²Stein, *Mark*, 102.

⁴³ Lane, *Mark*, 83. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 77, writes, “The proclamation of the gospel includes the defeat of the demonic powers.”

⁴⁴G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 696.

⁴⁵R. T. France, *Divine Government: God’s Kingship in the Gospel of Mark* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1990), 46-47.

Setting people free from the spiritual oppression of Satan's kingdom is more primary than relieving people from physical suffering. Louis Zamperini was imprisoned in Japanese concentration camps in World War II.⁴⁶ The beginning of his imprisonment was immediately preceded by near fatal starvation after being stranded for more than a month and a half in a raft on the ocean. During his confinement in the concentration camp, he suffered physical abuse, hunger, and exposure to the elements under the cruel dominion of his captors. If someone were to arrive in his concentration camp and offer him reprieve from his physical suffering, it would have brought some measure of relief. He would, however, still be in the clutches of a merciless regime. Imagine, on the other hand, the joyous sound of an announcement that Japan had been defeated and he was free! In the same way, Jesus' primary mission was not to simply relieve physical suffering but to proclaim Satan's defeat by way of the arrival of God's kingdom.

The people at Capernaum had heard Jesus' announcement of the arrival of God's kingdom and had been called to respond. His purpose had been fulfilled in this town and it was now time to go and announce the same message of the kingdom to the surrounding towns. From this point on in Mark's narrative, Jesus will be depicted as constantly on the move.⁴⁷ Jesus constantly moves to different areas, teaching and proclaiming the arrival of God's kingdom.⁴⁸ Jesus' ministry is distinctively Jewish, as Mark locates his ministry activity in the synagogues.⁴⁹ Jesus has arrived to announce to

⁴⁶For a compelling account of Zamperini's story see Laura Hillenbrand, *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* (New York: Random House, 2010).

⁴⁷France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 111.

⁴⁸Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 450.

⁴⁹Joseph Trafton, "Synagogue," in *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 753. He notes, "For the most part synagogues take on a larger meaning in the New Testament. In particular, synagogues frequently serve as places of God's revelatory activity."

Israel first and foremost that the fulfillment of God's promises has arrived and the kingdom of Satan has come to an end.⁵⁰

Summary

Jesus refuses to be controlled by the opinion of the masses but decisively sets the course of his ministry in accordance with God's will. While the crowds want to continue to benefit from his miraculous powers of healing and his disciples want him to set up a base of operations in the place where he has already achieved great popularity, Jesus derives his ministry priority from the divine purpose for which he was sent. The primary function of his ministry is to announce the arrival of God's kingdom where it had not yet been announced, which is more graphically depicted through exorcism than through healing. Jesus has arrived to announce to Israel that the power of God's kingdom has come to push back the kingdom of Satan.

Contemporary Application

Jesus' ministry of kingdom proclamation would eventually be passed along to his disciples (3:14).⁵¹ The way Jesus conducts his ministry in these early stages sets the pattern for how his followers would engage their mission as well, even to the present day. Two applications from Jesus' activity in this passage inform the church in how it should engage in its kingdom ministry. The church today needs to conduct its ministry through seeking God's will in prayer and through maintaining a focus on preaching the arrival of God's kingdom where it has not yet been preached.

⁵⁰Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 68.

⁵¹Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel*, 455.

The Church Needs to Pray Like Jesus

J. C. Ryle, commenting on Jesus' prayer in Mark 1:35, offers a poignant rebuke to our prayerlessness. He is worth quoting at length:

What shall we say to those who never pray at all, in the face of such a passage as this? There are many such, it may be feared, in the list of baptized people—many who rise up in the morning without prayer, and without prayer lie down at night—many who never speak one word to God. Are they Christians? It is impossible to say [they are]. A praying Master, like Jesus, can have no prayerless servants. The Spirit of adoption will always make a man call upon God. To be prayerless is to be Christless, Godless, and in the high road to destruction. What shall we say to those who pray, yet give but little time to their prayers? We are obliged to say that they show at present very little of the mind of Christ.⁵²

Jesus sought out God's presence in prolonged prayer to seek guidance and strength for his ministry. Those who seek to do the work of announcing God's kingdom without being disciplined in their practice of prayer will do so without power and direction.

This is illustrated in the ministry of the disciples later on in Mark's gospel. In Mark 9:14-29, Jesus' disciples are having difficulty driving out a demon from a young boy. After Jesus arrives and successfully exorcises the demon, his disciples ask him, "Why could we not drive it out?" (9:28). Jesus' answer is that, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." It is possible that Jesus suggests here that the disciples had not prayed while performing the exorcism. It is more likely, however, that Jesus here criticizes their failure to conduct their ministry in a persistent discipline of prayer.⁵³

Christians too often underestimate the power of a disciplined prayer life. They ought to seek to emulate Jesus in his commitment to pray. J. A. Alexander remarks that here is "the most convincing proof of the necessity of prayer to our spiritual life."⁵⁴ As Jesus sought to strengthen himself and to align his will to the direction of the Father, so Christians should be consistently and persistently seeking God's will for their own life

⁵²J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2007), 1:18.

⁵³Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel*, 417.

⁵⁴Alexander, *Mark*, 26.

and ministry. May the image of Jesus, bowing in the darkness in solitude, placing his life before the Father, be an enduring motivation for his followers to do the same.

The Church Needs to Seek to Reach the Unreached

Jesus was not content to continue building his ministry in a particular area where he had gained a high level of popularity. He was driven in his purpose to announce the kingdom where it had not yet been proclaimed. Obviously, the local church cannot fully adopt Jesus' itinerant ministry. They should, however, mirror his drive to see the gospel of God's kingdom announced where it has not yet been preached.

When announcing his intention to leave Capernaum to preach in other areas, it is of note that Jesus does not say, "I am going somewhere else to the towns nearby." Rather, he says, "Let *us* go somewhere else to the towns nearby [emphasis mine]" (1:38). Joel Marcus notes, "[The disciples] have a vital role to play as they will eventually carry his ministry of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth."⁵⁵ As the narrative progresses from this point onward, the disciples become an increasingly active part of Jesus' proclamation ministry.⁵⁶ They will continue to be the heralds of God's kingdom, bringing the news of the fulfillment of God's promises to those whose ears had not yet heard (6:7-13).

Those same apostles would then hear another commission from Jesus in Acts 1:8: "You shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." This mission that began with a move out from Capernaum to the surrounding towns would eventually extend through his followers to the ends of the earth. The mission of the church is to bring the gospel to areas that have not yet heard. So Christians, the followers of Jesus today, ought to reflect the mission of

⁵⁵Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 204-205.

⁵⁶Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel*, 455.

Jesus and the apostles in seeking to see Christ preached where he has not yet been heard (Romans 15:20). Every faithful church should have a desire to support the spread of the gospel in unreached areas.

Conclusion

Jesus appeared as the long-awaited fulfillment of God's promises. Being divinely attested by sounds and signs from heaven, Jesus engages and pushes back the kingdom of Satan through the announcement of the arrival of God's kingdom. Jesus' authority to bring God's kingdom is displayed in his authority over the unclean spirits. His compassion on those who suffer under the oppression of Satan's kingdom is shown in his miracles of healing. Jesus pursued his ministry of kingdom proclamation with a desire to remain faithful to his divine calling and he would not be set off course by the misunderstanding of neither the crowds nor his disciples. Jesus' followers today should mirror the ministry priorities of Jesus, seeking to support kingdom ministry through the discipline of prayer and striving to see the gospel reach ears starving to hear the good news.

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD FROM MARK CHAPTER 1

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This project consists of a series of sermons preached through the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark with a special emphasis on examining the text through the lens of biblical theology. In particular, this includes seeing Mark's first chapter through the lens of redemptive history. Mark presents Jesus' ministry as the inauguration of the kingdom of God which brings the fulfillment of salvation promises made in the Old Testament. Mark uses both explicit quotation and implicit references to numerous Old Testament texts to give the full significance of Jesus' arrival. Specifically, Jesus brings the kingdom of God with a power that both pushes back the kingdom of Satan, as displayed in his authoritative teaching and ministry of exorcism, and invites men to enter God's kingdom through sacrificial faith and repentance.

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