

## The Good News as told by Mark

---

# The time has come

### *The beginning of the Gospel*

*Mark 1:9-15*

After a brief introduction (which we looked at last week) and an account of John the Baptist's ministry, Mark begins his account of the mission of Jesus with a summary of his preaching. After a brief retelling of Jesus' baptism and time in the wilderness we hear Jesus proclaim, "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (15)

This brief verse is Mark's summary of all Jesus taught and did. Like any summary it tells us a lot, but not everything, but what it does tell us is important. First we are told that God is in control. It might seem to us as we look around the world that the forces of chaos and random chance, laced with a certain amount of human malice, are in control. But it only seems that way. When Jesus tells us the time has come he is saying that God's plan is unfolding on schedule. Notwithstanding the political, economic, social or religious 'realities', God is working his purposes out. It is important to hear this because if you just use your eyes and look at the world around you you are in grave danger of being misled. Listen to Jesus, he says God's appointed time has come.

And what does God's timetable reveal? That God's kingdom is near. God's kingdom is simply any place, person or circumstance where God's rule is acknowledged. For many, God's will, no matter how good it may be, is a distant dream, something that we may aspire to but will never experience until God fulfils his promise and makes all things new at the end of time. Certainly, we will not experience the full weight of glory of God's eternal kingdom until that day, but Jesus also spoke of living in and experiencing God's kingdom now, today. God's kingdom is not just a distant wish, it has come near.

Much of the rest of Mark's Gospel goes on to explain what life in this 'now but not yet' kingdom is like. Another Gospel writer, Luke, sets it out like this: [Jesus read from the words of Isaiah,] "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour... Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21)

Here is the heart of the Good News and the reality of our faith. Prisoners are set free, and who are these prisoners other than those who are held captive by powers beyond their control? Past mistakes or bad choices hold us in chains we cannot break. We live every day with the consequences of our past and are unable to do a thing about it. Jesus says he has come to set such prisoners free. And who are the blind this promise refers to if not those who stumble through life unable to see the path ahead or to avoid the pitfalls that litter the way? Darkness covers them. The darkness of desire, lack of hope or a simple inability to know which way to turn. Jesus gives sight to those who ask. He also promises freedom for the oppressed, for those who are worn down by the heavy burdens life has placed on them, promising that his burden is light and that he will help carry it.

If you follow Jesus' example and turn to that same passage (it's the opening words of Isaiah 61) you will see that the promises of God's kingdom are endless: the broken hearted will find healing, those

who mourn will be comforted, those in despair will find it in their hearts to praise, shame and disgrace will be lifted... the list goes on and on. This is kingdom life. This is what Jesus tells us is near. Is there anyone here today who doesn't long for such a life?

One of two questions may come to your mind at this point. The first might be, "How do I get this kingdom life?" Or perhaps you ask yourself, "Why do I not experience these things myself?" The answers are linked, though not identical. The first question is answered by Jesus' own words in our text: "Repent and believe the good news!" 'Repent and believe' tell us we need to act, to take positive steps, first by turning away from the lies the world persists in showing us: lies such as nothing can change, what's done is done, you'll never amount to anything, you're no good, you can do what you like, it's your right. But then we must turn towards the truth that is Jesus and believe the good news as promised by Isaiah and the prophets and fulfilled in Jesus.

But that is only the beginning. I often meet with those who have made this choice to turn away from lies and towards Jesus who tell me that they do not experience such freedom, sight, comfort or peace in their lives. I struggle with this too, and I've come to see that the answer is complex but do-able. First, we must remember that being a Christian is not about a past event but rather it is an ongoing process. I am a Christian not because on a Sunday evening way back in my teens I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. I am a Christian because I follow, or at least try to follow, Jesus every day, including today. Jesus calls us to be followers, to be disciples, not merely believers.

But secondly we must remember that these promises are not inalienable rights. Jesus' promise to give freedom, light and sight is not a 'get out of jail free card'. Paul, who knew well the power of Jesus to change his life testifies that it is not all plain sailing: We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. (2 Corinthians 4:7-10)

Jesus himself tells us as much: "Truly I tell you, no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life." (Mark 10:29f)

If we are to prepare for life in God's kingdom we must make this radical turn away from the lies the world would have us believe and turn to God and entrust ourselves to God's Word and not go looking for our own insurance policy. Excessive anxiety about success and security often leads to compromises with our faith. We allow other things to stand between us and our worship and service of God. The good news is that it need not be this way and we can experience the rule of God in our lives. It will not be a smooth road to fulfilling all our dreams, however. Notice that Jesus begins to preach in Galilee after the authorities have imprisoned John the Baptist. Turning to the Lord means turning away from all the voices calling us to walk some other path.

Amen.

Knighton Baptist Church  
Sunday 24 January 2021