



What is the Gospel?

Mark 1:1-20

Speaker: Scott Dudley

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So, Lord, that's our prayer, that You would make us like You. Help us to love the way You love. Use Your word to speak to us, and change us, and break our hearts for what breaks Yours, and help us to be people who will follow You with everything we have. We pray this in Your name, Jesus. Amen.

Go ahead and have a seat. Well, great to have you here. Those of you who are in this room, thank you for being here. Those of you who are joining us online, thank you for joining us in worship as well. When our kids were growing up, my wife and I wanted our kids to love reading, so my wife worked really hard to find books for them that they would like, which in my son's case, was really challenging because he needed books with lots of action.

I mean, basically, there needed to be a battle on the first page or he was out. He just needed lots of action. So Christina was always looking for books that had a lot of action. In fact, the way we got him to read the Bible was we found a graphic novel version of it, which was all action, and he loved it. And that is the book of Mark in the Bible.

It is all action. And the first four books of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, those are called the Gospels, which is a really important word, and I'll get to it in a minute. And the four Gospels tell the story of Jesus each from a slightly different perspective. And Mark doesn't have a lot of speeches, he doesn't have a lot of philosophy. Mark, it's just all action.

What we see is Jesus in action constantly. In fact, the word immediately or at once appears 41 times in the book of Mark 7 in the first chapter alone. And this summer, we're going to read through the book of Mark together as a Church. We've created a summer reading plan for you all, complete with a sticker chart to monitor your progress. When we did a reading plan in the fall, only the kids got the sticker chart, except my

wife took one home anyway, which she didn't know she wasn't supposed to do, and she found the sticker chart really motivating, so per her request ...

Now, even the adults will get a sticker chart, all right? So yeah, you get a sticker chart, and you get a sticker chart, and you get a sticker chart. So you can pick all of that up in the lobby, and all the sermons will come from the book of Mark. And we see Mark's bias for action from the very first sentence of the book, and it says this, "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus." The beginning.

Are there any other books in the Bible that start with the phrase, "The beginning," like maybe in the beginning, like maybe Genesis, which starts with an account of creation. Right off the bat, Mark is saying, "The gospel isn't something just to believe, it's something that happens." It's a new creation, it's a new beginning. And what does that word, gospel mean? Because we hear it a lot, but even if we have an idea of what the gospel is, often, our versions are smaller and weaker of what the gospel means of what we find in the Bible.

And it's a word that's been hijacked, right? It gets associated with street preachers outside T-Mobile Park, yelling at people that they're going to hell, and the people are like, "No, I'm going to a baseball game. I mean, it's the Mariners, so sometimes it feels like hell, but they're doing better this year. They are," or we've shrunk the gospel down to, "Jesus died on a cross to pay the price for my sins so that I can go to heaven," which is true, but that's like this much of a gospel, okay? It's so much bigger. To reduce the gospel down to, "Jesus gets me into heaven," is like taking just one bite of a chocolate cake, all right?

It's good, but it's not satisfying, because there's so much more. And in order to be Jesus disciples, who are becoming like Jesus, and have His courage, hope, joy, all of that, peace, power, all of that, in order to be those people, there are things we need to know, there are things we need to feel, and there are things we need to do. And one of the things we really need to know is, "What is the gospel exactly?" But not just know it so that we have it in our head, the book of Mark is all about action, so we need to know what the gospel is because that can guide our actions. And the entire book of Mark is about the gospel, so this summer, we're going to learn a lot about the gospel all summer long, but just for today, as kind of an overview of the book of Mark and this sermon series, here's the main point, the gospel doesn't just change me so I can go to heaven, the gospel changes everything.

It changes everything. And it's not just something we believe, it's something that we participate in. It's not a noun, it's a verb. It's about action. It's action-oriented, and it changes everything.

The word, gospel is an old English translation from the word that's used in the original Greek, which is euangelion, and it means a good announcement or good news. In Bible times, it often referred to an announcement that a battle had been won, or that there was a new king or something like that. In Jesus day, the most famous, good announcement was when after civil war in the Roman Empire, Augustus Caesar defeated his enemies and restored peace and prosperity to the Roman Empire, and then he sent a bunch of people around the entire empire to gospel, to make a good announcement, that's what the word, gospel means, to make a good announcement that a new King was in power to usher in a reign of peace, and prosperity, and justice. And in the first sentence, Mark says the entire theme of his book is about the good announcement, AKA gospel, the good news. And as the bankruptcy of our secular gospels get exposed, that money and pleasure are not enough to live a meaningful and joyful life, we need more.

And as our secular gospels repeatedly fail to give us the courage and the hope we need, especially in difficult times, people are open to the authentic gospel, the good announcement, because the gospels of our culture are letting us down. And all the data shows that we are a nation of angry, divided, bickering, depressed, and anxious people, something's not working, something's not going right, Jesus says, "I have a better way, and it's the gospel," which Mark announces in the fifth word of his book. And whereas Matthew, and Luke, and John spend a couple of chapters doing the backstory and the setup for Jesus, Mark dispenses with all of that in a couple of verses, and he gets straight to the point in verses 14 and 15, and it says this, "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news." That is the gospel of God. "The time has come," He said.

"The kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news," AKA gospel. So I want to look at these two verses, kind of one phrase at a time so that we can, not just know what the gospel is, but act accordingly on it. So let's just look at this one phrase at a time, "Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news." That is the gospel of God. "The time has come."

So here's Mark's bias for action. No more waiting around, no more passivity. The time is now. The good news, that prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah in the Old Testament predicted the Savior, the Messiah. He's here. No more waiting, no more sitting around.

It's time for action. Let's get going. The kingdom of God, which is the next phrase, the kingdom of God, and in the original, the Greek word for kingdom is more active than it is passive. It's more like the ruling of God, the reigning of God, not something just to believe, but something that is happening around us, that we can act on, and the kingdom of God means the range of God's effective will. It's wherever and whenever things are happening the way God wants them to happen.

It's where things are done on earth as they are done in heaven. And we can participate in that or rebel against it. That's up to us. And Jesus uses the phrase, "Kingdom of God" around 120 times, and He only uses the word, Church twice. So clearly, He had a

bigger emphasis on the kingdom of God, and Church and kingdom of God are not the same thing.

Remember when I said a few minutes ago, that the word, gospel means good announcement, usually about a battle that was won or a new king that was on the throne? Jesus' good announcement is this, a new King is in charge. Jesus is now king, and in His kingdom, things are done differently. In His kingdom, the real leaders are servants because the first shall be last and the last shall be first. In Jesus' kingdom, the poor are given a hand up, the lonely are set in families.

In Jesus' kingdom, people turn away from their sins that are hurting them or hurting other people, and know those sins are forgiven because Jesus did die on a cross to pay the price for them, and then He rose again from the grave, and all of that reconciles us to God so that we can now have a close personal relationship with God through Jesus. In Jesus' kingdom, His Holy Spirit empowers us to be the people that He created us to be. In Jesus' kingdom, people forgive each other. Folks divided by race, politics, education, class, generations, they become united. In Jesus' kingdom, His Holy Spirit empowers His followers to repair broken systems so that there's justice and so that everyone has a fair chance.

In Jesus' kingdom, the Holy Spirit working through His followers makes schools, and offices, and neighborhoods, and families, and churches a little bit more on earth as it is in heaven, and Jesus is a very different kind of king. He wasn't born in a palace, He was born in a barn. He didn't punish His enemies, He forgave them. He didn't lead an army, He led some disciples that changed the world with His love. He's not Caesar, or Biden, or Trump, and His kingdom doesn't look like Rome, or America, or any other country in the world.

A new King is in charge, and things are going to be real different from now on. That's the gospel.

Amen.

That's the gospel. And this is super important. This is super important to get in our heads. What is Jesus' good announcement? Does He go saying, "Hey guys, I'm starting a new religion."

"If you sign up today, I'll give you some free knives," or, "Hey, guys, if you follow a bunch of rules and be good, you can go to heaven." No. The good announcement, the gospel is that the kingdom of God, Nick's phrase, has come near. The kingdom of God is not up there somewhere in heaven, it's on earth as it is in heaven, and it has come near to us here and now, God himself coming in human form in the person of Jesus to bring His kingdom. And it's not going to be fully here until Jesus returns, but we get glimpses of it here and now, and already, it has made a big difference in our world.

A book I'd invite you to read is called Dominion by Tom Holland, not the Spider-Man Tom Holland, but a difference Tom Holland. Secular atheist, atheist, not Christian, historian. And the subtitle is How the Christian Revolution Remade the World. Again, not a Christian. And he shows that everything we consider right and noble, things like freedom, human rights, justice, all of those things came from Jesus, and they have no precedent before Him, because see, the gospel doesn't just change you and me, the gospel changes everything, which brings us to the next phrase, "The kingdom of God has come near repent."

And in the original Greek, that has kind of two meanings. One is just turn around and go the opposite direction, the other is to change your mind, change your worldview, because see, the gospel changes everything, which means it also changes our worldview. The kingdom of God, which was Jesus' main message, is different than what we think. It's different than our worldview. It defies all of our expectations, of what we think the good life really is, and yet, it is where our deepest longings for meaning, and relationship, and connection to God are met and fulfilled.

New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright, paraphrases it this way, "Jesus says, 'Give up your agenda and trust Me for mine.'" Don't waste your life, pursuing your dream or the American dream, get a bigger dream. Get a bigger dream than a three-car garage and the admiration of others, and as much pleasure as you can grab, right? Is that the pinnacle of our life goal? I mean, those things aren't bad, they're just small.

There's a better dream, which doesn't mean go quit your job or school, and go be a missionary or a pastor. For some of you, it might mean that, but for most of us, it means to participate in bringing God's kingdom to our office, or our school, or our neighborhood, or wherever we find ourselves, and I'll give an example in a minute. Repent, and last word, believe the good news. Only believe is not quite the right translation of that word. It's more action-oriented than belief.

It's more like trust or lean on, lean against the good news, because we all have stuff we're leaning on for our worldview, CNN, Fox, social media, right? Jesus says, "Get your worldview from Me, not just in your head, but actually lean on it. Put your weight down on it. Act on it." And the difference between believing and trusting is huge.

I can believe something in my head, but if I don't do it, I don't actually trust it, which means I don't actually believe it's true. Some of you have heard me talk before about how when I did college ministry, every year, I would take the students on a rock climbing trip. And at the beginning of the rock climbing, the guides would always reassure the students by talking about how thick the ropes were, how many backups they had, how the anchors were put in the rocks and all of that, but there always came that moment when it was time to repel, which is when you kind of jump backwards off this giant cliff,

and then tied to a rope, and then kind of bounce your way down. And then, when you're ready to jump off that cliff, you say, "On repel," and repel is a French word that means I've lost my mind. I'm about to jump off a cliff right now.

And I remember the first time I did it, praying, "Oh, God, just please don't let me scream like a five-year-old kid in front of the students." But then I jumped and discovered that the ropes, they held, and they were good, and it was fun. Now, I could give intellectual assent to what the guide said about the sturdiness of the rope all day long. I didn't believe it until I jumped. There's a difference between just believing and acting. Mark is a gospel of action.

We see Jesus in action, healing, and transforming, and creating community in all kinds of things. The gospel is not about giving intellectual assent to a bunch of truth claims, it's about action and transformation, which brings me to the action steps for this week. First, join in the summer reading plan of Mark. Pick up the plan in the lobby with the sticker chart and all of that. You can pick it up today.

Kids will get theirs in Sunday school. Theirs, I just need to warn you, theirs are much bigger, okay, but don't be jealous, okay? You can get yours. It's in the lobby. It's also on our website, and then read it.

And a lot of you may be traveling some this summer. That's all right. You can participate on vacation. And if you get behind, just catch up, and read it with your kids, read it with your grandkids, even if they don't live here, nieces, nephews. Maybe invite someone who doesn't go to church, but is spiritually curious to read it with you.

And then, by September, we will have read the book of Mark, which is from beginning to end gospel, a good announcement, good news. So this summer, steep yourself in good news by participating in this reading plan, and then let it change your worldview. And then second action step, gospel, the verb. Do the stuff. Live as though a new King is in charge because He is, and that changes everything.

It changes you, it changes me, it changes my mind, it changes our worldview, it changes our behaviors. And as we participate with Him in bringing His kingdom, it changes the world around us. The Gospel is not just something we believe, it's a verb. It happens in you, through you, and around you. When I did college ministry, I had a lot of fraternity, sorority, athletes who were, for lack of a better term, part of the cool crowd, and then there were a bunch of students who weren't, and that created some tension in my college ministry.

Now, if you didn't grow up here in the U.S., fraternity, sorority, fraternities are just kind of houses or sometimes just clubs for college-age men, sororities are for women. And I know that most of us here aren't in a fraternity or sorority at the moment, and I know that the whole cool, not cool thing, that's not part of our lives, right? We don't do that. We don't have the in crowd and the out crowd, the wealthy, successful people, and then everyone else who wants to be around those people, right? We don't do that.

We don't assess people on how they dress, or their college, or their job, or the car they drive, or how much money they have. We don't try to network with certain people because we think they might advance us in some kind of way. So totally does not apply to anyone in this room, but listen, for a friend. Just to be clear, that's some heavy sarcasm. The whole in crowd, out crowd, that never goes away, right?

Well, there were these three guys in my college group that I mentored, all of them in the same fraternity. And fraternities are often places of great community and friendship, but this particular one had lost its way, and there was just a lot of hard relational stuff going on. And I kept telling these three guys, "You're leaders. Use that to make your fraternity more like what Jesus want it to be," and they would say, "I'm not a leader, I'm too much of this, I'm not enough of that. And besides, Scott, if I did what you're asking me to do, people might think I'm weird, people might not like me, people might think I don't belong in that fraternity anymore."

And again, I know we, in this room, don't worry about what other people think about us ever, but just keep listening for that friend of yours that's super screwed up. Well, in their junior year, during rush, and rush is when you go to a bunch of parties for a week, and then the fraternity votes on the people they've met, who they went in and who they went out, well, there was this one student also in our college ministry, who I'll call Charlie, and Charlie was not in the cool kid crowd, and he rushed this particular fraternity. And the night of the voting, all the guys in the frat, first round of voting voted Charlie out, and then my three guys found their voice, and they stepped into who God had made them to be, which was leaders in that fraternity, and they said, "Charlie's with us. Charlie is a great guy," but the other guys in the frat said, "No, no, no, we don't want him," but my three students would not let it go all night long. They wouldn't let it go.

And finally, about 7:00 in the morning, one of my guys started to cry, and he said, "You don't understand, I shouldn't be here. Do you know how screwed up I am? Do you know how messed up I am? Do you know how insecure I feel most of the time? Do you know how worried I am about what the rest of you think of me all the time?"

"I'm no different than Charlie, and if you don't want him, how can you want me?" And something in the room shifted. And not only did they vote Charlie into the fraternity, and not only did Charlie go on to be one of the best loved guys in that fraternity, it changed

the nature of that fraternity. It made it more of a community. Guys got more honest with each other. They stopped pretending to be cool, and they actually talked about what's happening in their lives.

They stopped even asking the question, "Who's cool? Who's not? Who's in? Who's not?" I mean, they stopped even just asking that question. They honored each other better.

They made better friendship. The following year's rush wasn't about who's cool and who's not cool. All that was gone. My three students gossiped, the verb. They repented, changed their worldview, that, "Oh my gosh, staying in this fraternity, having people think I belong here, that's the most important thing."

They changed that worldview and it gave them courage to go against the crowd. And the result was a new king started calling the shots in that fraternity. Not 100%, but it was a little more in that fraternity as it is in heaven. The good announcement, the gospel changed my students, gave them courage, and made them brave. And by the way, this was one of the highlights of their college, that they were able to be a part of changing that fraternity for the better.

That was one of the highlights that God let them do that through His power. It changed the gospel. The good announcement changed my students, and it changed that fraternity, and you and I can do the same thing in our neighborhoods, our schools, our workplaces, the grocery store, the gym we go to, at soccer games and soccer practices. That's the gospel in its fullness, all things being made a new creation. So don't settle for a poor, pale, puny, pitiful, pasty, paltry, pathetic gospel of sin management and fire insurance to keep me from the fires of hell.

The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe a new King is in charge, and that changes everything. Jesus. Thank You for your gospel, and we pray that You would make us Your gospel.

Make all of us Your gospel, living, walking gospels into Your world, filled with Your power, filled with Your love. Lord, as we do this Bible reading plan this summer, change our worldview, change our hearts. Help us to think what You think, care about what You care about. May what brings a tear to Your eye bring a tear to ours. As we do this Bible reading plan, Lord, help us to be like You.

Help us to be living, walking, breathing gospels that You send into the world that make everything different in Your name. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What words and phrases get repeated in the first 20 verses of Mark? What are the main themes these verses highlight?
- Based on the first chapter, what does Mark want us to know? What does he want us to feel? What does he want us to do?
- From these verses, what is the "good news" Jesus brings? How would you define it in your own words?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Have you experienced a time when you gave up your agenda or dream to participate in bringing God's kingdom? What happened? How did it change you?
- Who might you invite to join you in the summer reading plan?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.