

## DAY 7: THE KINGDOM OF GOD APPEARS IN PERSON

Mark 1:1-20

**A NEW CREATION (MARK 1:1-8)** *“The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”* (1:1). Mark declares the motive for his Gospel in the first line: to proclaim that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the “good news.” He begins with a prophetic quote, combining messages from Exodus, Malachi, and Isaiah. Thus, John the Baptist is introduced as *“My messenger [sent] before Your face,”* and as *“the voice of one crying in the wilderness”* (Mark 1:2-3). John’s task was to *“prepare the way”* for One who would follow. In the Malachi passage the preparer is quite obviously Elijah, who did not die but was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. There was a strong expectation in Judaism that Elijah would return as a forerunner of the Messiah—and Mark saw in John the Baptist the return of Elijah.

This quotation links the life and ministry of Jesus to the Old Testament. Jesus is not an afterthought of God, as though an earlier plan of salvation had gone awry. Quite to the contrary, Jesus stands in continuity with the work of God in Israel. Thus, there can be no separation of New Testament from Old Testament. The quotation also offers a clue to the nature of Christ’s work. Three times in 1:2-3 His work is referred to as a “way” or “path.” Thus, the initial reference to the Messiah in Mark is as the “way.”

**THINK ABOUT** how the early Christians were referred to as those *“belonging to the Way”* (Acts 9:2). Paul testified *“that according to the Way, ... I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets”* (Acts 24:14). Jesus is not just the only way to the Father, He is the One who shows us the way to live. The way of forgiveness and access to the Father provided by Jesus is only the beginning of a new life of service and obedience, of love and good deeds. We can look to God’s Word to discern the right way to live, and learn to listen to His voice: *“And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it,’ when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left”* (Isaiah 30:21). What does it mean to you to be a *“follower of the Way”*?

**THE BAPTISM AND TESTING OF JESUS (MARK 1:9-13)** Mark tells us that *“all the country of Judea”* went out to John the Baptist. As a symbol of moral and spiritual regeneration, John called people to baptism. Though His baptism shared some similarities to proselyte immersion in Judaism, its primary purpose was to anticipate Christ’s baptism with the Spirit of God. Three events transpire when John baptizes Jesus, and each reveals Jesus as the Promised One of the Old Testament: the heavens open above Him, the Spirit descends on Him, and the heavenly voice speaks to Him, saying, *“You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased”* (Mark 1:11). Each of these three events fulfills a Messianic prophecy.

After His baptism, the Spirit immediately sends Jesus into the wilderness to be confronted by Satan. The testing that Jesus endures there is the will of God (Mark 1:12), for even the Son of God must freely choose obedience to the Father. This is the first recorded battle of God’s Son with Satan, whose defeat is a chief objective of the Incarnation: *“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil”* (1 John 3:8). As Moses and Elijah were on the mountaintop and in the wilderness 40 days, and as God was with them, so, too, is He with Jesus; God’s *“angels were ministering to Him”* (Mark 1:13).

**THE GOSPEL IN A NUTSHELL (MARK 1:14-15)** Jesus timed the beginning of His ministry with the imprisonment of John the Baptist. John was the forerunner of Jesus, not only in His message but also in His suffering. John’s martyrdom is a signpost to Golgotha. John may fall, but the gospel cannot be felled. When the executioner’s sword silences the prophet, the Son Himself takes over; when the Son ascends to heaven, the Spirit descends to empower the church. The gospel cannot be bound. No personality, not even John the Baptist, is indispensable, for the time that all creation has awaited is here at last—the Son proclaims that the kingdom is at hand.



Jesus calls all people to “repent” (1:15). The Greek word, *metanoein*, means *to change a course of action*. It is not so much a feeling as a decision, an about-face in attitude, which leads to a change in behavior. “*The time is fulfilled,*” said Jesus. The word for *time* in Greek means *critical moment* as opposed to length or duration. The preaching of the gospel by Jesus Christ is the turning point in history; it is *the* moment among all others that promises salvation and meaning to life. Paul would speak of this moment as “*the fullness of time*” (Galatians 4:4). With unparalleled conviction, Jesus identifies the kingdom of God with His own person and proclamation.

An essential element of Christ’s message is “*the kingdom of God*” (Mark 1:15). The Jews of Jesus’ day spoke of God’s kingdom as something one took upon oneself in obedience to God’s command or something that was expected after the complete destruction of God’s enemies. It was dependent on human decision and action. But the New Testament concept of the kingdom of God is that it is entirely dependent on God’s sovereign action and radically present in Jesus’ words and deeds. The kingdom of God might be best explained as *God’s reign*—whether it is in an individual life, the life of a church, or a group of people or a nation. God has established a beachhead for His kingdom in this foreign and hostile world.

**THE FIRST STEPS OF FAITH (MARK 1:16-20)** Jesus’ first recorded act of ministry was something quite simple and ordinary: the calling of four common men into fellowship with Himself. Before Jesus calls the four fishermen, He enters into their world—a world of boats and nets and hard work. Mark says Jesus “*saw*” them and called them by name. Jesus does not simply know about them, He *knows* them: Simon, Andrew, James, and John. And He sees them and knows them not in the midst of some spiritual pursuit or in a synagogue service, but in their normal workday world.

Jesus does not call them to programs or principles, but to Himself: “*Follow Me*” (1:17). He does not require them to change anything before they become His disciples. We cannot know exactly why they followed Him. But one thing we do know: the authority of His call compelled them to leave their nets behind. Over the centuries, Jesus has called many others to leave behind the secure, familiar, and treasured in order to be free to follow Him.

The final object of the call is not what Jesus calls us from, but what He calls us to: “*I will make you become fishers of men*” (1:17). What He wants us to become, He promises to make of us. He calls us not to a work of our own achieving but to a work of *becoming*, and our becoming must benefit others. Through the story of these four fishermen, Mark is speaking to all Jesus’ disciples: Christ calls us to Himself, and through us He calls the world.

**PERSONALIZE** this lesson. Reread the passage about how Jesus called the first disciples, Mark 1:16-20. Simon and Andrew “*left their nets and followed Him*”; James and John “*left their father Zebedee ... and followed Him.*” Ask God to show you what you might need to leave behind to follow Jesus fully. In prayer, commit yourself to letting go of anything in your life that might stand in the way of becoming Jesus’ disciple.

#### **REVIEW: THE KINGDOM OF GOD APPEARS IN PERSON**

15. What aspect of this first lesson proved most interesting to you? Why?