**REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS**

January 6, 2013

Mark 1:1-20

Key Verse: 1:15 “‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’”

Happy New Year! May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you in the new year. We begin the new year with Mark’s gospel study. Mark, the author of this Gospel, was the first to write down the events of Jesus’ life. The book of Mark, which stresses facts and actions rather than themes or topics, is the most exciting account of the life of Christ among the Gospels. Mark depicts Jesus as a suffering servant who gave his life as a ransom for many. He begins his gospel story with a declaration that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and ends with a Roman centurion’s confession of faith, “Surely this man was the Son of God.” Look at verse 1. “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” The gospel means good news. The gospel is the story of Jesus, the Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins and was raised from the dead. Mark begins his gospel narrative by introducing John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. Then he introduces the baptism and temptation of Jesus and the calling of the first disciples. May God bless us to accept the good news of Jesus with repentance so that we can be members of the kingdom of God.

I. John the Baptist prepares the way (1-8)

Look at verses 2-3. “It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’—‘a voice of one calling in the desert, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.”’” This is a prophecy concerning John’s coming as the forerunner of Jesus. Mark’s motive in introducing the prophecy of Isaiah is to emphasize the fact that the gospel is not a theory or a man-made story, but the fulfillment of God’s prophecies in history. What did John do as the forerunner of the Messiah? He prepared the way by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Here “repent” meant, “Turn from your sins to God and prepare your hearts to accept Jesus as the Savior of the world.” If they repented, John baptized them with water. It was nothing but the expression of cleansing, so that they might be ready to receive Jesus’ baptism of the Holy Spirit for the cleansing of their sins. John and Jesus delivered the same message of repentance. Here we see the importance of repentance as the precondition of the forgiveness of sin.

How did the people respond when John preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins? Look at verse 5. “The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.” It is amazing to see that all the people from the capital city Jerusalem responded to John’s message and came and confessed their sins, beating their chests and saying, “Oh, Lord! I was selfish. I lived in fear. I lived in despair. I lived an immoral life.” Outwardly, these people looked unlikely to repent and confess their sins to receive John’s baptism. But they were willing to solve their sin problem. They were tormented by their sin problem. John did not have to go out to find sheep because people came to him from all of the country. His mission was successful because he pointed out the core of people’s problem, the sin problem.

Look at verse 6. “John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.” John lived in the desert where he could give himself to the voice of God. His main menu was locusts and wild honey. Of course, it is impractical for us just to eat locusts and wild honey for mission. In modern term he ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches most of the time. He did not spend a lot of time for cooking. He did not spend a lot of time thinking about what to wear or what to drink. Instead, he spent a lot of time to hear the voice of God. He was born for mission, lived for his mission, and died for mission. His lifestyle and his message were identical. He practiced what he preached. He was different from the teachers of the law and the Pharisees who lived a double life with their hypocrisy. John lived a pure life. His pure life in the desert was his power source to be a servant of God. What kind of John the Baptist can we imagine if he lived in the 21st century Canada? Imagine that he has all kinds of communication tools like a cell phone, ipad, and facebook. Can he find time to hear the voice of God? He may hear only the voice of the world. It is very difficult to hear the voice of God because we are attached to this world too much. When we listen to the world, we become crazy and reactionary. If we are attached to the world too much, we cannot serve God’s mission. We must detach from the world and hear the voice of God through the Scripture reading and prayer. It is important to choose a key verse for 2013 and meditate on it day and night.

II. The baptism and temptation of Jesus (9-13)

First, Jesus receives baptism from John the Baptist (9-11). In verses 9-13 we learn how Jesus prepared himself before beginning the gospel work. Look at verse 9. “At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.” Jesus’ baptism by John was not a baptism of repentance, for he was sinless (Heb 4:15). It was the inauguration ceremony of the Messiah. Look at verses 10,11. “As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’” At the inaugural ceremony of Jesus, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus like a dove. The dove is thought to be the symbol of peace. As the Messiah of the world, he would serve people with love and peace. This also indicates that he will be led by the Holy Spirit. God was happy to see his Son begin the work of salvation. God waited for this moment so long. So God ordained Jesus personally as the Savior of the world. This inauguration of Jesus always renewed his spirit during the time of his earthly Messianic work. We also must come to God and renew our spirit that we are ordained by God and that we are chosen ones and we are shepherds of God’s flock. Those who are chosen by God as his servants must have the conviction that “I am ordained by God, not by men.”

Second, Jesus defeated Satan by 960 hours of prayer (12-13). Look at verses 12-13. “At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.” Jesus had to fight with Satan before he began his public ministry. It was because the first man, Adam, was defeated by Satan’s temptation, and then the world was cursed and death came into the world. Therefore, the first thing Jesus had to do was challenge Satan, who had defeated Adam. In doing so, Jesus understands the nature of the temptation and will help us overcome Satan’s temptation. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.” In order to fight against Satan, Jesus did not use his ability, even though he is the Son of God. Jesus depended totally on God through 40 days of fasting prayer. When Jesus went out into the desert, the battle with Satan was not a battle quickly won. Satan is stubborn like Pharaoh who refused to let the Israel people go until his first son died. This battle lasted forty days--960 long hours. Jesus had to fight all by himself as the second Adam. In this we learn that human life is a spiritual battle with Satan. Verse 13b says that Jesus was with the wild animals. The power of Satan seemed to be prevailing. Jesus did all his best and was at the point of falling to the ground. At that moment, God helped him through his angels to overcome the temptation of Satan. Here we learn that we should not give up fighting against Satan to the end. In order to be a great servant of God we must learn first how to overcome the temptation of Satan through the help of Jesus.

III. Repent and believe the good news (14-20)

First, Jesus began his ministry (14-15). Look at verse 14. “After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.” Jesus began his gospel ministry when evil men beheaded the righteous (Mk 6:18,19, 26-29). The times were so evil that it was a most unlikely time for anyone to start any work, much less start gospel work. But Jesus began his gospel work in that terrible situation. Jesus teaches us here that we can do gospel ministry in any circumstance by faith. The fact that Jesus began his gospel ministry in the horrible circumstances of those times gives us new hope for praying for Canada. As we know, Canada is experiencing moral decay and spiritual darkness. But in this circumstance we have to pray that God may send a spirit of revival through the Holy Spirit. The gospel work is possible in any situation. We should not think that we can do gospel work only after we get good jobs or finish a degree or raise up children. Now is time to begin the gospel work.

What was Jesus’ message when he began his gospel work? Look at verse 15. “‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” What did Jesus say first to people in order to deliver the gospel message? He said, “The kingdom of God is near.” What a beautiful message! What an everlasting message to those who were suffering in this world with no hope. Jesus the King is already here. Jesus is inviting everyone to come into his kingdom. Where Jesus is, there is the Kingdom of God. Anyone who accepts Jesus in his heart will have the kingdom of God with peace and joy. It is the good news of great joy. Jesus said, “Repent and believe” as the conditions for entering the kingdom of God. We must stop our lives of sin and turn our hearts to God. These days most young people’s minds are preoccupied with getting good jobs. It gives them great anxiety and despair. They should repent and trust in God. At the well conference, I saw many people who were full of energy and zeal to serve God. But I talked to two people from Chicago who were lifeless due to despair. They were like the first tree in the story of the Three Trees after it became the animal feeding box. One was living with his mother without any job, and the other was depending on his wife. Despair made them lifeless and useless. What does it mean for them to repent? They should believe Ephesians 2:10, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” In Jesus, they are God’s masterpiece and they can do great things. I encouraged them to find one small thing to do for God. Also at the well conference, many people were struggling with orphan spirit. Namely, living as if they do not have a father, always insecure, always fearful, lack of trust of others;

always having to depend only upon themselves. What does it mean for them to repent? They should believe Romans 8:15, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” They should accept their Father God and have the glorious assurance of being sons and daughters of God.

Second, the gospel work began with the choosing of disciples (16-20). At the beginning of his gospel work, Jesus chose his disciples. Look at verses 16,17. “As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’” What kind of people did Jesus call? They were hardworking fishermen. Jesus’ calling fishermen as his disciples seemed to be too small compared with the power of this world. To raise several men would not seem to change world history much. But Jesus believed that God would change the world through them. He was right. The twelve disciples changed the world history. What was their response to Jesus’ calling? Look at verse 20. “Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.” In order to be a good fisherman, first, we need to follow Jesus. The more we are like him, the more successful we will be in winning others to him. Second, we need be patient. Often there are long lonely hours of waiting. Third, we need persistence. A good fisherman is a not easily discouraged. These days fishing became very difficult. One strategy Hyde Park UBF adopted is that they go to campus, not to fish, but to bless them. They don’t try to invite students on the street to Bible study. Rather they ask if they want to bless them. If the students show interest, then they are invited to Sunday worship service. I was impatient and discouraged that I have not fished on campus last one year. It is time to resume to go to campus to bless them as prayer servants.

May God help us to have the kingdom of God through repentance and faith and serve others with the message, “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”