**REPENT AND BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS**

January 12, 2020

Mark 1:1-20

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

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 4 Gospels. It is the shortest among the 4 gospels, yet it is often most detailed. Mark depicts Jesus as a suffering servant who gave his life as a ransom for many. The key verse of Mark’s gospel is 10:45, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” It is the key verse of UBF in the new year 2020. Mark 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 good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.” The good news 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.

**First**, 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 you believe in Satan’s lies, you need to stop believing in Satan’s lies, and believe God’s words. Satan whispers in your ear that you are useless. Satan whispers in your ear that you cannot overcome your problems of anxiety, bad habits and sins. Satan whispers in your ear that God is indifferent in your problems. If you believe those lies, you remain in sin. Remaining in sin results in despair. In short, repent means to change our thinking, our belief, and our action.

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. His mission was successful because he pointed out the core of people’s problem, namely, 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. 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. It is very difficult to hear the voice of God if 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 every day.

**Second**, The baptism and temptation of Jesus (9-13). 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.’” 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. We also must come to God and renew our spirit that we are ordained by God; we are chosen by God; 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.”

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. He knows the path of victory in every temptation because he was tempted and yet he never gave in to 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 overcome temptation, we need to follow Jesus very closely.

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. Satan used wild animals to intimidate Jesus. 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.

**Third**, Repent and believe the good news (14-20). 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. According to a report by national heritage group, 9,000 churches in Canada will close in the next 10 years, roughly a third of all churches. But even in this circumstance, God is working. We need to see God at work in his revival through the Holy Spirit. We just need to open our eyes.

What was Jesus’ message when he began his gospel work? Look at verse 15. “‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’” Jesus is saying, “I offer you a place in the Kingdom, a place in the eternal Kingdom, the Kingdom of salvation, the sphere of forgiveness, if you repent and believe.” The gospel is the good news that God forgives sinners and takes them into His everlasting Kingdom when they repent of their sin and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the best news the world has ever heard. This is it for which the world has long waited, the most significant event in the world’s history, the arrival of the Savior who will pay the penalty for sin and thus provide salvation for all who have believed from the beginning of history to the end. The new King has arrived and with Him the Kingdom. The Kingdom is here because the King is here. Wherever the King is present, the Kingdom is. How are we to understand the Kingdom? Two aspects: Spiritual Kingdom and Eternal Kingdom. It is a kingdom that is now and not yet, that is invisible and later visible. That is the simple way to understand the Kingdom.

First time Jesus came, he preached the gospel of salvation. He establishes his invisible spiritual Kingdom in the hearts of all who believe all over the world. That is going on right now; the spiritual Kingdom all over the world. You are a part of the Kingdom by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is your King, He rules over you, and he rules over all who belong to him. When you became a Christian, you came into his Kingdom. You are a part of his Kingdom. To seek Christ is to seek his Kingdom and his righteousness and to receive everything else, as Jesus promised in the Sermon on the Mount. That is the spiritual sense of the Kingdom. In the future, there will be the eternal Kingdom, which lasts forever, and where Christ reigns forever and ever as King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus will come the second time to establish his eternal kingdom. How do you get into the Kingdom? Repent and believe the gospel. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repent and believe the gospel.

**Fourth**, 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 send you out to fish for people.’” What kind of people did Jesus call? They were hardworking ordinary fishermen. Jesus did not call lazy bums, doing nothing. Nor did he call religious leaders. 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.” Jesus called people to follow him. He called them in an extreme way. He basically called them to abandon absolutely everything. What is Jesus saying to them? “Drop your family business. Drop your life the way it is. Join me, let me train you to be a preacher of the gospel, a herald of the Kingdom.” As your king, Jesus has a right to demand your absolute obedience, demand your life to be a living sacrifice. But he is going to demand your obedience not to make your life miserable, but to make your life fruitful.

Jesus also said in Mark 8:34, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” It is the end of your life the way it is, drop everything, follow me, I will make you fishers of men. They would understand that analogy. There was one use of that in the Old Testament, Jeremiah 16:16, fishing for men, but it was with a view to judgment. But when Jesus said, “I will make you fishers of men,” it was with a view to salvation. Jesus wants to use them to bring in people to be saved. Here Jesus established the means by which the spiritual Kingdom will advance. He will use transformed sinners whom he calls by his authority and grace. Soul-winning is an art like fishing. In order to be a good fisherman, firstly, we need to follow Jesus. The more we are like him, the more successful we will be in winning others to him. Secondly, we need be patient. Often there are long lonely hours of waiting. Thirdly, we need persistence. A good fisherman is a not easily discouraged.

May God help us accept God’s invitation, “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Big Idea: Through repentance we become citizens of the kingdom of God.