

Theme: The Good News of God's Kingdom. Gospel: Mark 1.14-45

Today introduce Mark's Gospel: roaring pace, beginning with announcement of 'good news'

A. Expectation of Good News in 1st C context: (Mark written in Rome mid 60s during Neronian persecution, to primary Gentile audience)

In Roman Empire/Hellenistic thought

Good news related to Emperor who brought peace - security and prosperity

- Roman understanding: Emperor= 'saviour' and harbinger of good news. Augustus reigned 27BC-14AD

Priene Calendar Inscription (9 BC)

'Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, **sending him as a saviour, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things... and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good news for the world that came by reason of him...**



BUT Roman Empire built on militarism and slavery

- Good news for the ruling classes and wealthy. Not such 'good news' for everyone else.

In words of 17thC philosopher Thomas Hobbes, for vast majority life remained "nasty, brutish and short" (because Hobbes argued, humans are naturally selfish and wicked.)

In Jewish understanding

Isa 52.7ff

Good news = God's people in God's promised land under God's rule/reign.
Practically: Return from exile and oppression and slavery.

A king like David who would restore monarchy and political independence, glorify Zion and the Temple. People living under Torah. Shalom.

The vision of Micah 4.1-8 fulfilled.

In common (Hellenistic and Jewish)

The agent = a *human* king – appointed and anointed by God/the gods, a ‘son’ of God (Ps 2)/the gods.

For Jews, a ‘son’ in a metaphorical (not literal) sense of God-appointed and receiving God’s Spirit when anointed – see 1 Sam 16.13 “Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward.”

Message of Mark 1.1-13

- the ‘Good News’ (to Christians in Rome) is ‘of Jesus Christ, *the* Son of God’, i.e. the true Son of God, not Caesar. Not a metaphor, but to be taken literally.
- It’s the Good News Jews have long looked forward to/waited for
- It’s the fulfilment of what God promised in the scriptures
- First God sent a forerunner, John the Baptizer, to prepare the way for Jesus: calling people to repent and turn back to YHWH. (Malachi 3.1; **Isaiah 40.3**).

BUT John, the first prophet in nearly 500 years, declared that one far greater than him was coming, one who would baptize not with water but with the Holy Spirit.

i.e. Repentance = essential, but it is only *the beginning* of the Good News itself. It is *the prerequisite* to being subjects of the King

The Good news = those who repent and believe in Jesus will receive the HS of God!

- Something extraordinary will take place. Mark doesn’t quote the prophet Joel, ch. 2, but that surely in view. Joel prophesied the outpouring of the HS as accompanying the restoration of Zion and the return of God to dwell with his people.

It’s the beginning of a whole new world order, not just the King but all citizens of the kingdom filled with God’s Spirit (those who reject John’s baptism will be burnt up – see Luke 3).

Then Mark tells of Jesus' baptism

- the heavens being torn open: answer to Israel's cry in Isa 64.1
- Holy Spirit descending
- Voice: "you are my Son, the beloved"

Conforms with Jewish expectation and prophecy, but John's words and Voice from Heaven exceed this.

From this time it is *the Spirit of God* which drives Jesus' ministry – first into the wilderness, then into and throughout Galilee.

In next 6 verses, vv. 14-20, Mark introduces the 2 major, interconnecting plots of his Gospel:

- 1. The Kingdom of God: Jesus' first announcement**
- 2. Discipleship: Jesus' first act**

vv.14-15 Proclaiming the good news of God and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news." i.e. he announces an event – the coming of God's rule.

- "Good news of God"
 - An official proclamation, like the Priene inscription.
 - The announcement is the good news of God's rule.
- The time (*Kairos*) is fulfilled – for God's reign on earth.
 - Luke is specific (Luke 3.1-2) but Mark defines it in terms of OT prophecy. God's promises are being fulfilled, esp. Isa 40.9-11; 52.7 and 61.1-7; Zech 14 The Coming Day of the Lord – when the Lord will be King
- "The kingdom of God has come near" – spatial rather than temporal nearness - putting emphasis on Jesus' person)
 - its presence/inauguration, but yet to come in its fullness.
 - God's power has arrived in the person of Jesus. It can be seen!
 - NB. God brings in his kingdom, not humans!
- Response = "repent and believe..." cf. Acts 2 "and you will receive the HS..."
 - Repentance = dealing with the past, a turning away from where gone before

- Belief = determines the way forward, following ‘the way’ of Jesus.

2nd major plot

vv.16-20 The calling of the first four disciples: Andrew and Simon, James and John.

- This, not a miracle, is Jesus’ first recorded act.
- had been disciples of John’s and Jesus would have known them (see John 1.35-42).
- Successful businessmen, employing others.
- The call is to follow Jesus, himself. Disciples normally chose their rabbi, applying to be his disciple, not the other way around, and were understood to be following the Torah, not the teacher.
- In Mark, following Jesus = following ‘the way’, potentially to the same end as John the Baptist (v.14) and Jesus himself. If Mark written in Rome in 60s, the time of the Neronian persecution, this was particularly pertinent.
- We are all challenged, like Abraham, Moses, the prophets, the 12, to leave everything (incl. family, career, wealth) to follow Jesus.
- It’s not only a call to follow Jesus, but to serve under him too: “I shall make you become fishers of men”

David Garland:

When the fisherman hooks a fish, it has fatal consequences for the fish; life cannot go on as before. The disciples are called to be agents who will bring a compelling message to others that will change their lives beyond recognition. Jesus’ call has the same effect on them.”

Remainder of chapter dominated by miracles, though not exclusively – Jesus’ teaches and prays too.

Although Mark stresses Jesus as teacher (1.21-22, 39; 4.1-2; 6.6,34), and his disciples and others often address him as ‘Rabbi’, he records very little of the content of his teaching: only 4 parables (4.1-32 and 12.1-12, 5 if count wineskins analogy in 2.21-22) and only a little direct teaching and always in dialogue with the religious leaders in response to their questions (2.15-28; 3.23-30 and 7.1-23). No systematic account of his teaching,

BUT 18 miracles recorded

vv.21 – 28 Teaching *with authority* (divine/supernatural) and exorcism in synagogue at Capernaum.

Gundry: vv. 16-20 have exhibited the authority of Jesus' word in calling disciples. Verses 21-28 now exhibit the authority of his word in teaching and exorcism... and the fact that Mark does not tell us what feature of Jesus' teaching displays authority shows that the point lies in authority as such... The result of this combination (teaching and exorcism) is not a subordination of exorcism to teaching (much less a criticism of exorcism), but a co-ordination in which the two support each other (cf. 2.10-11; 6.2; Acts 13.6-12; Gal 3.5; Heb 2.1-4)

First glimpses of what this Kingdom of God is like:

- Defeat of old ruler - Satan. If there was any doubt about who had won in the desert (v.13) this incident leaves no doubt.
- Jesus' authority. Mark doesn't tell us what he taught, but presumably read from the prophets and pointed to fulfilment in himself (as did at synagogue in Nazareth in Luke 4).
- Jesus didn't quote Moses, or Rabbi xxxx, but said "I tell you..." but more significant, surely, is his *demonstrated* authority – over Satan
- He derived his authority not from the traditions of the elders but from God himself (1.11).
- Cf. Sermon on Mount "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you..."
- See too Luke 4 in Nazareth sermon

The demon both

- Correctly identifies who Jesus is: the Holy One of God, AND
- Correctly describes Jesus' mission: "to destroy us" i.e. Satan and demonic forces.

Luke 11.20 "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you." (= Matt 12.28, except "by the Spirit of God")

NT Wright: "When the church learns again how to speak and act with the same authority, we will find both the saving power of God unleashed once more and a similar heightened opposition from the forces of darkness."

Jesus silences the demon because "at this point a Hellenistic audience think that the unclean spirit has gained the upper hand and is going to adjure Jesus not to torment it... Thus the silencing of the spirit starts the

process of exorcism... the lack of an adjuration, or an incantation, of an appeal to some deity or supernatural power, of a physical manipulation - all techniques normally used in exorcisms - lets all the emphasis fall on the authority of Jesus' own simple but effective command" Grundy.

The newness of Jesus' teaching lies not in the content but the authority with which Jesus gives it..

vv.30-45 Healing of leper, who proclaimed it freely.

Jesus has healed so many, yet Mark homes in on this miracle – must do so for good reason.

Asks “if you will” not “if you can”. It would have been assumed that his leprosy was divine punishment for sin, hence would Jesus want to?

An important early manuscript (D) has Jesus “moved with anger (at the man's suffering)” – as in Jn 11.33-38.

The point of his having to go to the priest is, presumably, firstly that Jesus is complying with the instruction of the Torah (Lev 14), but more importantly, the offering of a sacrifice signifies that a priest has declared the leper clean, thus verifying his healing. Hence the plural “to them” in v.44. His offering will be “a testimony to them”, i.e. to all who knew him as leper. The fact that he will have to go up to Jerusalem to see a priest will also buy Jesus time!

Note that a priest can only declare someone clean. Only Jesus can make them clean.

NB. Jesus' healing ministry isn't a problem in terms of “a distraction from his real call, which is to preach” (in the words of those who argue for this). Jesus is always willing to heal. It's only a problem in that it limits his ability to move freely (because he is ‘mobbed’) and it becomes a political risk: people will come and try to take him by force to be their king, and not the kind of King he has come to be (cf. John 6.15). He is ministering in the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas. Hence the ‘messianic secret’.

Message

The good news of Jesus Christ/God = far better than Hellenistic or even Jewish expectation.

Broader and deeper issue:

- **Broader** in that not just peace between nations, end of war (which necessitated huge army and taxes to fund!), and privileges for the elite, but shalom for all: freedom from sin, poverty, sickness, all oppression and death itself.
- **Deeper** issue of source of true shalom, and why can't be brought by a human king/saviour: at heart of problem = human heart, and consequences of sin, of which war and oppression are obvious symptoms. Both past sins and sinful heart need to be dealt with before new age dawns, and then the Holy Spirit needs to be poured in (cf. Ezek 36.25-27)

BUT truth = no human leader or govt. could resolve these issues, or even the superficial issue of no war. Even Israel's (mis)understanding of Messiah (as human Davidic king) = inadequate

Good News of Jesus = far broader and deeper.

- John's baptism dealt with past sin and turning of heart ready to receive the Messiah, the Good News he announces is coming
- Jesus' baptism – after he has dealt once and for all with the problem of sin, and pours out his Spirit for the renewal of the heart and inaugurating the kingdom.

Because of realignment between (Jewish) expectations and reality, going to be trouble.

- Opposition from 'the ruler of this world' – Satan
- Misunderstanding of nature of kingdom
- Misunderstanding of way in which it will be inaugurated - cross

BUT benefits/ joys = out of this world

Everyone misunderstands Jesus in first half of Gospel: family, crowds, Gerasenes, hometown, religious leaders, his own disciples (8.17-18). Only demons know who he is.

Suggested Discussion Questions

1. In what ways can we point to the Kingdom of God being visible in the world today?
2. One of the finest biblical scholars alive today, Bishop NT Wright, says of this passage: “When the church learns again how to speak and act with the same authority (as Jesus showed), we will find both the saving power of God unleashed once more and a similar heightened opposition from the forces of darkness.” Do you agree? If so, how does the church ‘learn again’?
3. In Jesus’ ministry, preaching/teaching and demonstrations of power go hand in hand. Jesus refused to be trapped in Capernaum by the overwhelming size of the crowds who came to him, but that didn’t change his approach: he continued to both teach and drive out demons/heal. How important is it that pronouncements of God’s reign and power are accompanied by displays of that reign and power?
4. Jesus was empowered by the Spirit and by prayer. What can we learn from this?
5. The first disciples left everything, immediately, in response to Jesus’ call. Yet they often misunderstand the nature of Jesus’ mission. How do you understand God’s call on your life and the mission we are engaged in in his name?

You might also look at any of the questions in the daily readings in “The Roar of the Lion”.