

READING Mark 1:9-20

SERMON

God's Servant Is Here! (Mark 1)

“The time has come....The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15 NIV)

This is what we read in Mark 1:15. If you have a Bible near you, you might to open it at Mark 1 which is found on page 1002.

So what is the good news? **Repent and believe the good news!”** (Mark 1:15 NIV). Couldn't we all do with good news at the moment with the credit crunch on, wars waging in the Middle East, wars and famines happening in many parts of the world. So what is this good news? It is found in verse 1

“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” (Mark 1:1 NIV)

Or as the New Living Translation puts it

“This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God...” (Mark 1:1 NLT)

Or to put it another way the good news is that Jesus has come and has brought with him power. As I was meditating on this chapter, chapter 1 of Mark, I was asking myself the question, ‘What is this chapter saying to me?’ and what was it saying – it was talking about power.

I thought this morning of beginning the sermon by saying that we begin the gospel of Mark as part of our theme this year. Our theme of Forward Thinking where we have the verse from Hebrews 12:2

Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. He never lost sight of where he was headed. (Hebrews 12:2)

Saying that we are looking particularly at the middle sentence in that verse, ‘**Study how he did it**’ and so Thinking of a Gospel. We will be looking into this gospel, this good news up to Easter.

I had thought about being by saying that Mark's gospel is the shortest of the gospels and is written in a very fast style. Some have called it the Sun newspaper version of a gospel. It is fast, it moves on from incident to incident, but it still helps us to study how Jesus did it.

I did think about beginning by saying that some scholars think that Mark was the first to produce a gospel and that Matthew and Luke both had access to it. However other scholars would disagree with that, but it makes no difference either way to what is being said through the gospel of Mark.

But what struck me was this notion, this concept, this reality of power. You will need to refer to the gospel of Mark, chapter 1 for this, so I hope that you can see a Bible. If not, then share with someone, be neighbourly!

Firstly we have the **power of his word**. Verse 21

“They, Jesus and the disciples, went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.” (Mark 1:21-22 NIV)

The people were amazed at his teaching and he spoke with authority, with power. We have a whole book of the words of Jesus. How can I say that? Jesus is described in John's gospel as the Word

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1 NIV)

Jesus is the word. So we need to listen to what he is saying, read his about lifestyle, study his Word, the Bible. The Bible is the powerful word of God. It is divinely inspired and so should be something that we listen to, that we read, that we take in. I, like some in this church, have begun reading Cover to Cover, the Bible in chronological order in one year. At the moment we are in the book of Job, a book we looked at in the evening services in 2008. The only way we can know the power of the word of God, of Jesus is by reading it – that is where it all begins. If you do not have time to read in the day, then buy a recording of the Bible and play it in your car on the way to work, or download it onto your ipod or mp3 player and listen to it.

Then there is **power over evil**. Verse 23

“Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.”
(Mark 1:23-28 NIV)

And again in verse 32

“That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.” (Mark 1:32-34 NIV)

Now you may not think that there is power here, because you may not believe in demons, you may not believe in evil spirits. You may see what the Bible calls demon-possessed people as people who are mentally ill, those who have a mental health problem. Mental health and demon possession are different things. Mental illness is an illness like flu or a broken limb. Demon possession is when a person is taken over by an evil spirit and no amount of medicine or medical intervention can cure the condition.

In this country I would say that we do not see a lot of demon possession because Satan does not need to work in this way. Most people reject Jesus and so naturally are following Satan. They may not be what we call evil, but they are not followers of God. Evil has a hold over us all, but that power is and can be broken, because we see in Jesus that he has the power to order demons, he has overcome Satan, Satan is defeated, we are now in the mopping up period.

If anyone tries to tell you that Satan is in control of this world, then they are wrong. I mentioned Job earlier and one of the things that we learnt from Job last year was that God allowed Satan to attack Job, but he put limits on him. The first time God says to Satan

“...”Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”...” (Job 1:12 NIV)

And the second time we read that God says

“...”Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.” (Job 2:6 NIV)

He also has **power over illness, or the natural world.** Verse 29

“As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.”
(Mark 1:29-34 NIV)

Jesus healed people because he had the power. This is why we pray for those who are unwell, because God heal. Sometimes he does it through medical means that he has given to us, at other times through his divine intervention. But Jesus had power over the natural world.

But there is a last power, the **power of love.** Verse 40

“A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: “See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere.” (Mark 1:40-45 NIV)

Jesus reached out and touched the leper. Something unheard of in his times. He did because of his love. Because of his love he was prepared to reach out to the outcast of his society.

Today those we may be saying that we do not see this power – we do not see what we have just read about. Power of the Word, power over evil, power over illness, the power of love. Why do we read about it, but not see it? Maybe the answer lies in what is also in the chapter

Verse 4

“And so John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.””

“At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. 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.”” (Mark 1:4-11 NIV)

The crowd and Jesus were obedient to be baptised.

Baptism is usually done shortly after a person has become a Christian. We see this in the description of John's purpose in verse 4

“And so John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mark 1:4 NIV)

We all need to repent, to ask God forgiveness. This often is the start of the Christian life for many people – it certainly was in the New Testament. The realisation that they have done wrong, that they have broken God's laws and so had to come and ask forgiveness from God, which he is very ready to give. But repentance is more than words – it is also action. Part of that action is that baptism is the outward sign that a person has asked for forgiveness. Now Jesus did not need this baptism of repentance, he had nothing to ask forgiveness for, but he was still baptised. He was giving us an example, his example and for him it was the beginning of his work.

Baptism is also a command in the Bible for us to follow. At the end of the first Christian sermon given by Peter, we

“When the people heard this, what Peter had been saying, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:37-39 NIV)

Repent and be baptised and just as the Holy Spirit came down to Jesus at his baptism, so you too will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. If there is power in the Word as we saw before, then surely we need to take all of its commands seriously.

Baptism also talks about an old life being washed away and a new life being taken up. In the early life of the people of Israel they were leaving Egypt, their old life, a life of slavery. We too need to leave a life of slavery, a life being dominated by sin. But how?

The people of Israel had to cross the Red Sea – they were escaping from Egypt, from their lives as slaves, from their evil. They had gone so far, but now they had the Egyptians behind them and the Red Sea in front of them. It seemed like an impossible situation. They went forward toward the Red Sea and they crossed over on dry land because God miraculously piled the waters of the Red Sea up on either side of them, so the land in this ‘valley’ was dry and they walked across in safety. However their taskmasters, the Egyptians, they were drowned as the sea came crashing back down and engulfed them. As we go into the baptistry, no, the waters do not part, or pile up, but the sin is washed off, the hold of the taskmaster, Satan is broken, we walk out to a new life, a resurrection life, a life of freedom – the freedom that only Jesus can bring, that only the Father can grant, that means being filled with the Holy Spirit and having God with you always.

Just as Jesus died and was laid in a grave for three days, and then rose with a resurrection body, so in baptism, you go down into under the water as if one is dying. This is why I like to baptise people backwards because that is the more usual way that people are buried, and then three seconds or less later, not three days, the person rises up out of the water and is then prayed for, the gift of the Holy spirit is prayed for them and they leave the pool, changed I would say, to live as a new being in Christ.

So the people and Jesus were baptised that day. But there was also **obedience in following God.**
Verse 12

“At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.” (Mark 1:12-13 NIV)

Jesus needed to be on his own with Father, to know his plan, his work, to talk to him. Later we read, verse 16

“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." At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.”
(Mark 1:16-20 NIV)

The disciples were called and they left everything and followed him. Have we left everything to follow Jesus? I do not mean that we have to leave work, sell all our possession and then move into a cave and live the life of a hermit. But is God, is Jesus ‘numero uno’ in your life? Do you try to find out how he wants you to live? Do you know that you are doing something wrong, because His Word says so, but you make an excuse for it, or you think God will overlook it, or you just don’t want to stop doing it?

Is that being truly obedient to God? Jesus says, ‘Come, follow me’ and the disciples did follow him wholeheartedly and eventually we read

“After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he spent some time with them, and baptised.” (John 3:22 NIV)

Part of that obedience was baptism, but it was also their lifestyle following what Jesus said, by reading the Bible and applying what it says to my life, how I live.

Before we can have the privilege of power, we need to recognise the responsibility of obedience. But the great thing is that it is open to everyone. God, Jesus does not expect us to be perfect immediately – it is a lifelong task, but he expects us to conform, to be willing to bend our will to his. When the disciples followed Jesus, they were hearing his words, watching him, seeing how he lived, how he interacted with others, his relationship with the Father – that too is where we should be at.

As we enter 2009, let us be those who say a loud and enthusiastic ‘Yes’ to the command, “Come and follow me.”

PRAYER