

The Life of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: The Kingdom Is at Hand: Calling Disciples

Mark 1:14–20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson sits at the launching of Jesus' public ministry and centers on two things: the announcement of the kingdom and the call of the first disciples. Doctrinally, the most important and most easily misunderstood theme is the kingdom of God. Jesus declares that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom is at hand. Your aim is to help the class understand the kingdom as the New Testament actually presents it. The kingdom is the reign of God that arrived with the ministry of Jesus and was established with power when His church began on the day of Pentecost (Mark 9:1; Acts 2). Christ is reigning now, from the right hand of the Father, over His church (Colossians 1:13; Acts 2:33–36). Daniel had prophesied a kingdom that God would set up that would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44), and that kingdom is here.

Be ready to address, clearly but without harshness, the popular idea that Jesus came to establish, or will yet establish, an earthly, political kingdom, a future thousand-year reign on earth. The Scriptures point in a different direction. Jesus said the kingdom was at hand in His own day and would come with power within that generation. The book of Acts shows it arriving at Pentecost, and the rest of the New Testament speaks of Christ as already reigning and of believers as already in the kingdom. We are not waiting for an earthly throne; we are living under a reigning Christ. Teach this positively, letting the texts make the case, so that the class is built up rather than merely warned.

Formationally, this passage presses the question of response. The kingdom demands repentance and faith, a turning and a trusting, and the call to follow demands that we leave our nets. The immediate, wholehearted response of these ordinary fishermen rebukes our hesitation and our excuses. Help your class feel both the grandeur of the King and the cost of following Him, so that they respond as the first disciples did, by turning, believing, and following.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Mark 1:15, Jesus announces, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." What is the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims, how does this declaration show that God's long-promised reign was breaking into history in Him, and why is it important to understand the kingdom rightly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the phrase “the time is fulfilled.” Jesus is announcing that a long-awaited moment has arrived. The prophets had pointed forward to a day when God would establish His reign and send His Anointed One. Jesus declares that the waiting is over; the appointed time has come. This is the climax toward which the whole Old Testament had been leaning.

Define the kingdom of God carefully. At its heart, the kingdom is the reign or rule of God. To announce the kingdom is to announce that God is taking up His sovereign rule in a new and decisive way through His King, Jesus. It is not first of all a place or a political structure, but the active reign of God breaking into the world in the person and work of Christ. Where the King is at work, there the kingdom is present.

Show why understanding this matters. Many people picture the kingdom as a future earthly empire that Jesus failed to establish in His first coming and will set up later. But Jesus speaks of the kingdom as arriving in His own ministry and coming with power within that generation (Mark 9:1). Getting this right shapes how we read the whole New Testament and how we understand our own place as those already living under Christ’s reign. We will develop this fully at Question 9; here, lay the foundation that the kingdom is God’s reign, breaking in through Jesus.

Bring it to worship and allegiance. If the kingdom has come, then the King is on the throne now, and our lives are to be reordered around His rule today, not merely in some distant future. The announcement is a summons to live as subjects of a present King.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom of God as the reign or rule of God breaking into history through Christ
- The fulfillment of Old Testament promise in the coming of the kingdom
- The kingdom as present and active in Jesus’ ministry, not merely future
- The importance of understanding the kingdom rightly for reading the whole New Testament
- Living now under the present reign of Christ the King

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the kingdom is first of all the reign of God, not a place?
- How does “the time is fulfilled” connect Jesus to the hope of the Old Testament?
- How should it shape daily life to believe the King is reigning now?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus’ first command was, “repent and believe in the gospel.” Where in your life right now is God calling you to repent, to turn from a particular direction, and to trust Him more fully? What makes that turning difficult?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question grounds the kingdom announcement in personal response. Jesus pairs two commands: repent and believe. Repentance is a turning, a change of mind and direction that bears fruit in changed behavior. Belief is a trusting, a resting of the whole self upon the good news. The two belong together; you cannot truly turn to Christ without turning from sin, and you cannot truly believe without entrusting yourself to Him.

Help the class make it specific. Repentance is not a vague feeling of regret but a concrete turning from a particular direction. Invite each person to identify one area, an attitude, a habit, a relationship, a pattern of thought, where God is calling them to turn. General repentance changes nothing; specific repentance changes lives.

Acknowledge what makes turning difficult. We cling to familiar sins because they are comfortable, because they promise something, or because we doubt that God's way is better. Naming the difficulty honestly is part of the turning. Encourage the class to bring the hard, specific thing to God rather than settling for a general acknowledgment that they are sinners.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance as a definite turning from sin, not vague regret
- Faith as active trust in the good news, not mere agreement
- The inseparable link between repentance and faith
- The need for specific rather than general repentance

Discussion Prompts

- What specific direction is God calling you to turn from right now?
- What makes that turning difficult for you?
- How are repenting and believing connected in your own walk with Christ?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus called His message "the gospel of God," good news to be believed. What is the good news Jesus came preaching, and what does it mean to "believe in the gospel" rather than merely to know about it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Clarify the content of the good news. The gospel Jesus preached is the announcement that in Him God is fulfilling His promises, establishing His reign, and opening the way for sinners to enter His kingdom through repentance and faith. The fullness of that gospel will unfold across His ministry and supremely at His death and resurrection, but already here it is good news: God has drawn near in His King to save.

Distinguish knowing about the gospel from believing it. A person can be thoroughly informed about the gospel, able to summarize it accurately, and still not have entrusted themselves to it. To believe in the gospel is to rest the weight of your life upon it, to stake everything on its truth. It is the difference between knowing that a bridge will hold and actually walking across it.

Press toward genuine trust. Saving faith is not a bare intellectual assent; it is a living trust that takes hold of Christ and acts upon His word, the kind of faith that turns from sin, confesses Him as Lord, and obeys Him. The demons know the facts and tremble (James 2:19); they do not believe in the saving sense. Help the class examine whether their belief is the kind that has changed the direction of their lives.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The content of the gospel as the good news of God's reign and salvation in Christ
- The difference between knowing about the gospel and believing it
- Saving faith as living trust that acts, not mere intellectual assent (James 2:19)
- Resting the weight of one's life upon the truth of the gospel

Discussion Prompts

- How would you put the good news Jesus preached into your own words?
- What is the difference between knowing about the gospel and believing it?
- How can you tell whether your faith is active trust or only agreement?

Question 4

Student Question:

True belief in the gospel produces a change of direction, not just a change of opinion. Honestly, is your faith mostly mental agreement, or is it an active trust that reshapes your choices? Where do you most need your belief to move from your head into your daily life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the previous one into self-examination. Many sincere people have a faith that lives mainly in the mind. They affirm the right things but their daily choices look little different from those of their unbelieving neighbors. The gospel calls for more than agreement; it calls for trust that reshapes life.

Help the class locate the gap between belief and practice. Often we believe in theory what we do not yet live in practice. We affirm that God provides, yet we are gripped by anxiety. We affirm that He forgives, yet we are crushed by guilt. We affirm His lordship, yet we keep control. Identifying one such gap is the first step toward closing it.

Move toward an embodied faith. Invite each person to name one area where their belief most needs to travel from head to hands and feet this week, one choice, one habit, one relationship

that would look different if they truly trusted what they say they believe. Faith that does not touch the calendar and the checkbook has not yet fully landed.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith as active trust that reshapes choices, not mere mental agreement
- The gap between believing in theory and living in practice
- Embodied faith that touches daily decisions and habits
- The call to let belief travel from the head into the whole life

Discussion Prompts

- Is your faith more mental agreement or active trust? What reveals the difference?
- Where is there a gap between what you believe and how you live?
- What is one choice this week that would change if your belief fully landed?

Question 5

Student Question:

When Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (v. 17), He spoke with an authority that expected to be obeyed. What does the way Jesus calls these men reveal about who He is, and what does His promise to make them "fishers of men" teach us about the purpose of following Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Notice the manner of the call. Jesus does not plead or negotiate; He commands, "Follow me," with an authority that simply expects to be heeded. Rabbis of that day were typically sought out by prospective students, but here the King chooses His followers and summons them. This authority is a quiet revelation of who He is. Only One with the right to claim a person's whole life could call as Jesus calls.

Unfold the promise, "I will make you fishers of men." Jesus does not merely recruit followers; He forms them and gives them a mission. He takes ordinary fishermen and remakes them into people who will draw others into the kingdom. Note the two parts: He will make them, the transformation is His work, and they will fish for men, the purpose is mission. Following Jesus is never merely for our own benefit; it is for the sake of others.

Draw out the purpose of discipleship. To follow Jesus is to be changed by Him and sent by Him. He is not collecting admirers but forming laborers who will join Him in seeking the lost. This guards against a self-centered faith that wants the blessings of Christ without His mission.

Apply it personally. The same Christ who called these men calls His people still, with the same authority and the same purpose. To follow Him is to place ourselves under His remaking hand and to take up His heart for those who are not yet in the kingdom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The authority of Christ revealed in the manner of His call
- Discipleship as transformation, the work Christ promises to do in us
- The missionary purpose of following Jesus: fishers of men
- Following Christ for the sake of others, not only for personal benefit

Discussion Prompts

- What does the authority of Jesus' call reveal about who He is?
- What does it mean that Jesus promises to make us fishers of men?
- How does this guard against a faith that seeks Christ's blessings without His mission?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus called ordinary fishermen, not the powerful or the highly educated, to be His closest followers. Where are you tempted to disqualify yourself from God's work, thinking you are too ordinary, too flawed, or too busy, and how does Jesus' choice of these men speak to that?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Let the surprise of Jesus' choice register. The Messiah, launching the most important mission in history, passes by the religious elite and the powerful and calls fishermen. These were working men, not scholars or officials. God delights to use the ordinary so that the glory clearly belongs to Him.

Address the ways we disqualify ourselves. Many believers hold back from serving God because they feel too ordinary, too sinful, too uneducated, or too busy. The enemy is glad to keep us paralyzed by a sense of unworthiness. The calling of the fishermen is a direct answer: God's pattern is to take ordinary people and make them useful by His power.

Encourage a humble willingness. The point is not that these men were qualified, but that Jesus qualifies those He calls. The same is true today. Invite each person to name the excuse they most often use to opt out, and to consider that the One who made fishermen into apostles can use them too. Availability, not impressive credentials, is what He asks.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's pattern of using ordinary people for His work
- The excuses by which we disqualify ourselves from serving
- Christ qualifying those He calls, rather than calling the already-qualified
- Availability and willingness as what God asks of us

Discussion Prompts

- What excuse do you most often use to opt out of God's work?
- How does Jesus' choice of fishermen speak to your sense of unworthiness?
- What might God do through you if you simply made yourself available?

Question 7

Student Question:

Mark says that "immediately they left their nets and followed him" (v. 18), and that James and John left even their father and the boat. What does the wholehearted, immediate response of these men teach us about the priority and the cost of following Jesus?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mark's favorite word, "immediately," lands with force here. There is no delay, no request for time to weigh the options, no list of conditions. At the call of Jesus, these men leave their nets and follow. The response is instant and total.

Draw out the cost embedded in the scene. The nets and boats were their livelihood; leaving them meant leaving their security and their trade. For James and John, following also meant leaving their father Zebedee in the boat. Discipleship cost them something real, their work, their financial security, and a measure of their family ties as they had known them. Jesus' call has always carried a cost.

Highlight the priority that the response reveals. By leaving immediately, these men declared that Jesus was worth more than their nets, their boats, and their settled lives. This does not mean every disciple abandons their occupation, but it does mean Jesus claims first place over every other loyalty. Whatever competes with Him for the throne of our lives must yield.

Apply it without legalism. The lesson is not that everyone must quit their job, but that everyone must hold everything loosely enough to follow Jesus first. The immediate obedience of the fishermen exposes the slowness and the negotiating that often mark our own discipleship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Immediate, wholehearted obedience to the call of Christ
- The real cost of following Jesus: security, livelihood, and competing loyalties
- The priority of Christ over every other attachment
- Holding everything loosely enough to follow Jesus first

Discussion Prompts

- What strikes you about how quickly and completely these men responded?
- What did following Jesus cost them, and what might it cost you?
- What does it mean for Jesus to have first place over every other loyalty?

Question 8

Student Question:

Following Jesus meant leaving the nets that had defined their lives and provided their security. What “nets” are you holding onto, whether possessions, habits, relationships, or plans, that keep you from following Jesus with your whole heart? What would it cost you to let go?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question makes the nets personal. For the fishermen, the nets were their security and identity. For us, the nets take many forms: possessions we trust in, habits we will not surrender, relationships that pull us away from Christ, plans we are unwilling to lay before Him. Help the class identify their own.

Encourage honest naming rather than vague confession. It is easy to say in general that we want to follow Jesus wholeheartedly; it is harder and more fruitful to name the one net we are gripping most tightly. The Spirit usually presses on something specific. Give the class quiet space to consider what theirs might be.

Hold cost and grace together. Letting go of a net costs something real, just as it did for the disciples, and we should not pretend otherwise. Yet the One who calls us to leave our nets is the One who promises to make something far greater of our lives. The aim is not loss for its own sake but a fuller following of Christ. Invite each person to name one net and one first step toward loosening their grip on it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Identifying the specific attachments that hinder wholehearted following
- The cost of releasing our securities to follow Christ
- The greater gain Christ gives to those who leave their nets
- Specific surrender rather than vague good intentions

Discussion Prompts

- What net are you gripping most tightly right now?
- What would it cost you to let go of it?
- What is one first step toward loosening your grip this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Jesus declared the kingdom of God “at hand,” and elsewhere said that some standing there would see the kingdom of God come with power (Mark 9:1). When and how was this kingdom established, how does the New Testament show Christ reigning now from the right hand of the

Father over His church (Acts 2; Colossians 1:13; Daniel 2:44), and why should we not look for a future earthly political reign instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, so give it careful, patient attention, and let the Scriptures carry the weight. Begin with Jesus' own timing. He said the kingdom was at hand in His day, and in Mark 9:1 He promised that some standing there would not taste death until they saw the kingdom of God come with power. Whatever the kingdom is, Jesus placed its coming with power within that generation, not in a distant future age.

Trace where the New Testament shows it arriving. On the day of Pentecost, after His resurrection and ascension, Peter declares that God has made the crucified Jesus both Lord and Christ, seated at His right hand (Acts 2:33–36). The church is born, three thousand are added, and the reign of the exalted Christ begins in power. This is the coming with power that Jesus promised. Paul can then tell the Colossians that believers have already been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13). The kingdom is not merely future; Christians are in it now.

Connect this to prophecy. Daniel had foretold that in the days of the Roman kings, God would set up a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44). That kingdom is the church over which the risen Christ reigns. He is reigning now, from the right hand of the Father, and He will reign until all His enemies are put under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:24–26).

Now address the alternative gently but clearly. Some teach that Jesus came to set up an earthly, political kingdom, that He postponed it when rejected, and that He will return to establish a thousand-year reign on an earthly throne. But Jesus said the kingdom was at hand and would come with power in that generation; Acts shows it arriving at Pentecost; and the rest of the New Testament speaks of Christ as already reigning and of believers as already in the kingdom. We are not waiting for an earthly throne; we are living under a reigning Christ. Teach this as good news: the King is not delayed, He is enthroned, and His kingdom is the church in which we already share. Keep the tone one of confident joy in the reigning Christ, not merely argument against error.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The kingdom established with power at Pentecost, after Christ's resurrection and ascension (Acts 2)
- Christ reigning now from the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33–36; 1 Corinthians 15:24–26)
- Believers already transferred into the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13)
- The fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy of an indestructible kingdom (Daniel 2:44)
- Why Scripture does not support a future earthly, political, thousand-year reign
- Living now as citizens under the present reign of King Jesus

Discussion Prompts

- How does Jesus' own timing (Mark 9:1) shape our understanding of when the kingdom came?
- How does Acts 2 show the kingdom arriving and Christ beginning to reign?
- What difference does it make to live under a King who reigns now rather than waiting for an earthly throne?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the kingdom Jesus announced and the call He issued, name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to follow Him more fully right now, and one net you will begin to loosen your grip on in order to answer that call.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the lesson into a personal response. The kingdom has come, the King is reigning, and He still calls people to follow. Help the class move from understanding the kingdom to surrendering to the King.

Invite specificity in two directions: a way to follow more fully and a net to release. For one person, following more fully may mean taking up the mission of fishing for men, sharing Christ with a neighbor or friend. For another, it may mean a fresh repentance, a turning from something long tolerated. The net to release will be whatever is most tightly gripping them, named honestly before God.

Close by lifting their eyes to the King who calls. The same authority that summoned fishermen from their boats addresses them now, and the same power that made those men into apostles is at work in all who follow. Encourage the class to write down their one way of following and one net to loosen, and to take the first step this week, trusting the King whose kingdom will never end.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Responding to the present reign of Christ with personal surrender
- Following Christ more fully through mission, repentance, or release
- Identifying a specific net to loosen in answer to the call
- Trusting the power of the King to make something of those who follow

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific way Jesus is calling you to follow Him more fully right now?
- What net will you begin to loosen your grip on in order to answer?
- What first step will you take this week, and who can help you take it?