

The Life of Christ

Lesson 4: The Kingdom Is at Hand: Calling Disciples -- Mark 1:14-20

John the Baptist has been arrested, and into that shadow Jesus steps forward and begins to preach. Mark, who never wastes a word, gives us the very heart of Jesus' first message in a single breathless sentence: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." The waiting is over. The long centuries of promise, the prophets straining forward, the people watching for the dawn, all of it has been building to this moment. The King has come, and His reign is breaking into the world.

It is easy to read past the word "kingdom" as if it were a quiet, religious term. It is not. To announce a kingdom is to announce a King, a rule, a new order of things. Jesus is not merely offering private comfort or a set of moral tips. He is declaring that God is taking up His reign, that the rightful King is on the move, and that everything must now be realigned around Him. This is the announcement that the whole of history had been leaning toward.

And then Jesus does something striking. Having announced the kingdom, He walks along the shore of an ordinary lake and calls ordinary men. Not scholars, not priests, not the powerful, but fishermen with calloused hands and nets that smelled of the sea. "Follow me," He says, "and I will make you fishers of men." There is no résumé requested, no audition. There is only His authority and His call. And the wonder of it is that they go. Immediately, Mark says. They leave their nets, their boats, their father, and they follow.

That is the shape of this lesson: a kingdom announced and a call issued. The same King who walked that shore is still on the move, still summoning ordinary people away from their nets and into His mission. The question Mark presses upon us is not whether the kingdom is real, but whether we will respond to it the way those first disciples did, by turning from our old direction, trusting the good news, and following the King wherever He leads.

Group Discussion: Jesus summarized His entire opening message as "the kingdom of God is at hand." When you hear the phrase "the kingdom of God," what comes to mind, and why does it matter that we understand what Jesus actually meant by it?

Personal Reflection: The first disciples left their nets "immediately" to follow Jesus. What are the "nets" in your own life, the comforts, securities, or attachments, that you find hardest to let go of when Jesus calls? What would it look like to loosen your grip this week?

Read Mark 1:14-20

Study Questions

1. 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?

2. 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?

3. 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?

4. 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?

5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Daniel 2:44, the prophecy of a kingdom that God would set up that shall never be destroyed; Mark 9:1, Jesus' promise that the kingdom would come with power within that generation; Acts 2:36–41, the establishing of the church on the day of Pentecost as the kingdom begins; Colossians 1:13, where Paul says believers have already been transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son; Matthew 4:18–22, Matthew's parallel account of the calling of the first disciples.