

Introduction: “The Kingdom of God Is at Hand” (1:14-15)

*14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee,
proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying,
“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe in the gospel.”*

In our text this evening you can see four ways
that demonstrate that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

You need to understand that there is an *order* to these four ways.
Everything about the coming of the Kingdom is oriented around the *Word*.
The proclamation – the preaching of the kingdom –
is at the heart of everything else.

This is why the Men’s Leadership Study is starting
with an emphasis on how to *teach* the Bible.
If you do not know how to teach the Bible,
you will not know how to *do* anything else.
The power of the kingdom is rooted in the preaching of the kingdom.

But secondly, you need to understand that *preaching* the kingdom is not enough.
When I was at Westminster there was a man at another seminary
who was leading a revival of Reformed theology at a liberal seminary.
There was only one problem:
his life and conduct was a sheer disaster.
He was a gifted speaker, and so persuaded many,
but others were so disgusted by his immoral conduct
that his reform efforts were significantly affected.

Certainly the preaching of the kingdom is at the heart of everything Jesus does.
But the preaching of the kingdom
must be accompanied by the power of the kingdom.

What you see throughout the gospel of Mark
is this emphasis on preaching the gospel of the kingdom with power.

1. Disciples Follow Him (1:16-20)

*16 Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee,
he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea,
for they were fishermen.
17 And Jesus said to them,*

“Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.”

18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

19 And going on a little farther,

*he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother,
who were in their boat mending the nets.*

20 And immediately he called them,

*and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants
and followed him.*

Notice that when Jesus speaks, his disciples obey.

When Jesus calls them to leave their nets, immediately they follow.

When Jesus calls them to leave their father, they follow.

Jesus says to the fishermen,

“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

The image of fishing is quite unusual in scripture.

It occurs a couple times in the prophets and a few times in the gospels.

There is nothing in the Old Testament that would have created any expectation
that fishermen would have any special place in the coming of the kingdom.

But God uses the foolish and lowly things of this world
to shame the proud and wise.

And Jesus calls these humble fishermen to “follow me.”

The first thing you need to see is the power of the voice of Jesus.

When Jesus calls, his disciples follow.

Jesus calls you.

You are focused on your career.

You are preoccupied with your family.

And Jesus comes to you and says,

the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand;

repent and believe in the gospel.

What does this mean?

What do you do?

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.

How are you failing to deny yourself?

Where are you being selfish?

In what part of your life are you saying,

“this belongs to me!”

In that place,

deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus!

2. “Even the Unclean Spirits...Obey Him” (1:21-28)

21 *And they went into Capernaum,
and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching.
22 And they were astonished at his teaching,
for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.*

We haven't heard yet the content of Jesus' teaching.
But already we hear that his approach is not like the scribes.
The scribes recognized that their teaching was dependent on the scriptures.
Jesus, on the other hand, spoke with an authoritative “I say to you.”

But Mark does not leave us to speculate as to why.
He tells us – though through a rather unlikely voice!

*23 And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit.
And he cried out, 24 “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?
Have you come to destroy us?
I know who you are—the Holy One of God.”*

The unclean spirit recognizes who Jesus is.
Jesus is the Holy One of God.

In verse 3, as Brandon pointed out last week,
Mark had already identified Jesus as Israel's Lord.
John had come as the messenger in the wilderness,
“Prepare the way of the Lord.”
In Isaiah this clearly referred to the coming of Yahweh to Israel.
Mark is telling us that the coming of Jesus
is the coming of Yahweh to Israel.

And even the unclean spirits recognize this.

25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”

Now is not the time, Jesus says, for a discussion of my divinity.
The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe the gospel.

*26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice,
came out of him.*

*27 And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying,
“What is this? A new teaching with authority!
He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”*

*28 And at once his fame spread everywhere
throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.*

Why do they marvel so much at Jesus?

Two reasons:

- 1) he teaches with authority (making him at least a prophet)
- 2) unclean spirits obey him

This second reason needs some explanation.

After all, there is nothing in the OT about unclean spirits obeying the Messiah. The prophets had spoken of the Son of David who would overthrow their enemies, heal the sick, and perhaps raise the dead.

But casting out evil spirits was not especially in his job description.

Why is this so important?

Why does it matter that unclean spirits obey him?

In Genesis 3 man bowed down to the demonic power of the serpent.

Ever since Genesis 3, all of humanity has been subject to the powers of sin, death, and the devil.

The seed of the serpent has been arrayed against the seed of the woman, but time after time the serpent has won.

The powers of darkness have plunged all the earth under their dominion.

But now one has arisen – the Holy One of God –
who breaks the dominion of sin, death, and the devil.

Truly, the fullness of time has come!

If he has come to bring war against the powers of darkness,
then truly the kingdom of God is at hand!

And so the man with an unclean spirit cries out:

“Have you come to destroy us?”

This unclean spirit recognizes that a power has come that no evil can withstand.

Therefore Jesus does what *no one else* could ever have done before him:
he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.

In light of this, I would ask you a question:

if the unclean spirits obey him,
how much more should we obey him!

I know that they obey him by force –

but if that is so,
how much more should we, who have been called by his name,
freely obey him from the heart!

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe the gospel.

3. Disease and the Sabbath (1:29-34)

*29 And immediately he left the synagogue
and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.
30 Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever,
and immediately they told him about her.
31 And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up,
and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.*

You need to see the connection between the man with the unclean spirit in v24-26
and Simon's mother-in-law in 29-31.

He had an unclean spirit.
She has a fever.

Today we would make a sharp distinction between his "spiritual" problem
and her "physical" problem,
but as verse 32 indicates, Mark sees "sick" and "oppressed by demons"
to be fundamentally similar things.

What is more,
Jesus treats them in similar ways!

He heals the sick and he casts out demons
by the power of the Spirit who descended upon him at the Jordan.

When he comes to Simon's mother-in-law
he takes her by the hand.

Notice that she is too weak to take his hand –
he reaches down to her and lifts her up.

And immediately as Jesus grasps her hand, the fever flees.
Even so, as Jesus takes hold of us, our fever – the delirium of sin – passes.

The power of the gospel – the power of the kingdom – raises us up and restores us to life.

The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe in the gospel.

Notice what day it is.
Jesus will heal on the Sabbath.
It is especially appropriate for him to do so,
because he is bringing rest to his people.
The whole point of the coming of the kingdom
is the coming of that eschatological rest which was promised to Abraham.

Joshua did not give Israel rest (their enemies remained in the land).
Solomon gave only a temporary rest (one generation before it began to fall apart).

Jesus is the one who brings us into God's rest.

But it is curious to note that no one ever asks Jesus to heal on the Sabbath.

They understand that the Sabbath is a day to give rest to others,
so while Jesus may heal on the Sabbath,
they recognize that they are not to ask him to heal on the Sabbath.

32 That evening at sundown

they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons.

33 And the whole city was gathered together at the door.

*34 And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.
And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.*

People sometimes ask, "what do you think about demons today?"

How should Christians think about demons?

First, we should recognize that demonic power is real.

Some people have purely physical problems.

Other people have demonic problems.

Second, we also need to recognize that "demonic" does not equal "weird."

No one in the first century thought that demonic problems were unusual.

A Wall Street banker who is obsessed with making money
could be demonically afflicted.

And finally, Christians are nowhere commanded in scripture to cast out demons.

Jesus and the apostles do it,

but we are no more commanded to cast out demons

then we are commanded to heal the sick with a word.

The word for "cast out" is "ekballo" –

and so some have referred to casting out demons

as an "ekballistic ministry."

(And yes, when we talk about a "ballistic" missile

we are speaking of a missile that you "throw" a long way!)

An "ekballistic ministry" is a ministry of throwing out demons.

And that was the work of Christ and his apostles as they demonstrated
that the power of Satan was being overthrown.

But casting out demons and healing by a word or touch of command
are inseparably linked together in the scriptures (e.g. v34).

Jesus and the apostles do not heal everyone in every town –

nor do they cast out every demon in every place.

Rather, they heal and cast out demons in order to demonstrate
the coming of the kingdom of God.

What are we to do?

The way that we are to handle the demonic
is the same way that we are to handle sickness (James 5:13-20).
We are to pray, and anoint with oil with the laying on of the hands of the elders.

And speaking of prayer, we see in verse 35, that this is what nourished our Lord as well.

4. Praying in a Desolate Place (1:35)

*35 And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark,
he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*

He went out into a desert place –
the “wilderness” (the same word used in verses 3-4).
The wilderness is a dangerous place.
It is a place of trial and temptation –
a place of judgment and death.
It is the earthly place that is most reminiscent of the *tohu vbohu* –
the barren emptiness that was in the beginning.

John had called from the wilderness “prepare the way of the Lord!”
The Spirit had driven Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted.

But then Jesus had returned to the city.
He had returned to the people of God.

And what he found there was worse than the wilderness!

The city of man is more desolate than the wilderness.
Sickness and demons, fever and convulsions –
this is what characterizes the city of man...
even among the people of God.

And so Jesus returned to the wilderness to pray.
Moses had prayed in the wilderness.
Elijah had prayed in the wilderness.
Even Jacob had wrestled with the angel in the wilderness.

Now Jesus prays in the wilderness.
And ever since the church has reflected on this relationship
between the wilderness and the city.

The desert fathers told of three friends who had each sought to live out the words of Jesus.
“The first one took to heart Jesus’ beatitude ‘Blessed are the peacemakers’
and chose to spend his life reconciling those who fought one another.
The second adopted as his life’s work the care of the sick.
The third went out to the desert to live a life of prayer and stillness.

The first, for all his efforts, found himself unable to make peace
in a world bent on hatred and vengeance and war.
Disheartened, he sought out his friend the healer, to see if he had fared any better.
But the second was equally dispirited.
So the two went to the third.
They told him of their own lives,
how they had pursued the noble ventures of peacemaking and healing
but had somehow, along the way, lost heart.
They begged him to guide them, to tell them somewhere to go, something to do.

The three sat in silence a while.
Then the third, the desert dweller, poured water into a bowl
and told them to look at the water.
It lapped up against the sides, agitated, swirling and bobbing up and down.
They sat a while.
Then he said to them, 'Look how still the water is now.'
When they looked down again, they saw their own faces.
The water had become a mirror.
And so the desert dweller said to his friends:
'It's that way for someone who lives among human beings.
The agitations, the shake-ups, block one from seeing one's sins;
but once one becomes quiet, still, especially in the desert,
then one sees one's sins.'" (Sayings of the Fathers, 2.29)

Certainly Jesus did not need to go to the desert to see his sins,
because he was sinless!
But *even* Jesus needed to remember the purpose for which he had come.

Before you can act –
before you can *go* somewhere and *do* something,
you first must become quiet, still, especially in the desert.

As Ed Clowney once said, "don't just do something, stand there!"

Even Jesus, the one who really could and did do something,
needed at times simply to stand there and wait upon his Father.

Conclusion: "For That Is Why I Came Out" (1:36-39)

*36 And Simon and those who were with him searched for him,
37 and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is looking for you."
38 And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also,
for that is why I came out."
39 And he went throughout all Galilee,
preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.*

Notice again that the reason why Jesus came was to preach the gospel of the kingdom.

The good news of the kingdom is that the Exile is over!
The good news of the kingdom is that the new Exodus has come!

And as Mark puts it in verse 1,
the good news of the kingdom
is the good news of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

In Jesus, God has done for us what we could not do for ourselves.
In Jesus, your sins are forgiven.
In Jesus, death is defeated.
In Jesus, humanity is restored to favor with God!

Don't just do something, stand there!

And yet, we must also see that the preaching of the kingdom
is inseparable from the power of the kingdom,
as Jesus casts demons out of those who are afflicted.

Verse 39 connects these two in particular:
“preaching in their synagogues
and casting out demons.”

Wherever the gospel goes,
the power of Satan is overthrown.

We may not follow the ekbballistic model –
but as we pray for our demoniac society,
as we speak to those who are obsessed with power and privilege and pleasure,
we need to remember that it is the gospel of the kingdom,
the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that alone brings peace to those who are perishing.

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe the gospel.