

Mark 1:14-15

Jesus' Gospel In One Sentence

Jan 2018

Mark 1:14-20

Jesus Begins His Ministry

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."

Intro

Something that has developed for Barbara and I over the years living in Europe is knowing where to buy what in which country. For things not available locally we need to shop elsewhere. Part of the fun of being international that comes is experiencing how different the shop environments are. I like to explore the advertising and messaging as part of the local culture.

Last year when leaving a chemist store somewhere in England I passed this interactive panel on the way out of the store.

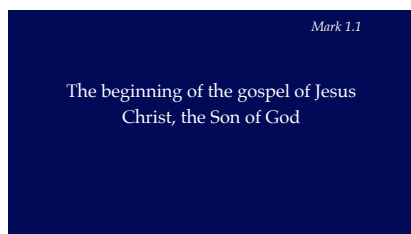
You could read it in various ways. It would seem this chain of stores is interested in having people self-report their emotional condition upon leaving the store perhaps to be taken as a measure of customer satisfaction? *Should we have one here on Sundays –perhaps at entry and departure to assess difference?*



I am usually a get-stuff-and-go sort of shopper. So for me, I would respond to this 'feel good' question in terms of whether I got the stuff I was looking for. For me it's all about the expectations I have before I walk into the store! In the same way, an advert is only good news if it speaks to a pre-existing need or interest.

Text

I want to apply all that to the Gospel of Jesus that we heard from Jesus himself this morning. Since Christmas we have been celebrating Jesus but today is the first time we hear him speak. Those of you with red-letter edition bibles strike red ink for the first time.

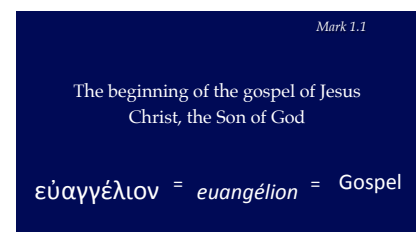


Mark's Gospel begins with a banner statement, a capital headline, that I read as a teaser-advert setting up expectation for the 15 chapters that follow. It's a single verse that promises much.

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God

Every word here is significant.

To advertise what is coming and set up expectation Mark uses a known word in a new way. It's the Greek word *euangelion* which literally meant 'good announcement' or 'glad proclamation'.



In wider usage this is what described the announcement of a public holiday or the birth of a son to the emperor or a victory in battle. An *euangelion* was an official declaration of good news that everyone could benefit from.¹ In English we translate that as 'gospel' conveying the sense of a good story. In Dutch it becomes 'evangelie'.

¹ εὐαγγέλιον ᾧ (euangélion) *n* (genitive εὐαγγελίου)

So the teaser opening line says what you are going to hear now is an *euangelion*, a public proclamation of good news. This good news concerns Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Each word here is richly loaded and sets up expectation.

It's about a person named as Jesus Christ. He has a Jewish name sounding like 'Joshua' meaning 'He shall save his people' and the Greek title 'Christ' relating to the Jewish hoped for Messiah, the anointed one.

That is quite something but wait there is more in this little teaser line! This good news proclamation concerns the Son of God. Have we now got your attention?

Whether you are Jewish or Greek something should be registering by now. This book is about a Saviour-Messiah who is none less than *the one and only* Son of God. We are not talking prophet, teacher, life coach, earthly king, or super servant of God, we are proclaiming *The* anointed Saviour, *The* Son of God. That's the good news.

So that is the first verse set-up. All that in just 5 Greek words or 12 English words! ²

But if you have studied language or just try your hand at communication now and then, there is potential for confusion here. It could be misread in English. Consider that word 'of'. It renders a Greek genitive. You could hear that as:

A) This is the good news Jesus brings so listen up and hear what he says.

and/or

B) This Jesus person is himself the good news so engage him as your salvation from God.

I believe it is both *what* he says and *who* he is but unless we grasp who he is we will miss the power of his message. Jesus is himself the Gospel and he brings Gospel.

So having set up expectation in this way in verse 1, Mark gives some coverage of John the Baptist's ministry and the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan.

This brings us to where Jesus speaks for the first time. Mark leads into this in v.14:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,

In opening his mouth, Jesus makes a single loaded statement for people to hear. It comes in two powerful parts:

Mark 1.15

Jesus' first sentence in 2 parts

A. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;

B. repent and believe in the gospel."

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This is what I want us to hear today.

This is the Gospel of Jesus in his own words. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

Exposition

In line with how expectations work, this is only going to be good news if you have been expectantly waiting for God's Kingdom. If people were wanting something else such as a new religion, or world peace, national revival or imperial glory then this was going to disappoint.

² Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ.

Perhaps it would be good to ask: Who this was good news for? Who was Jesus speaking to here as intended audience and, do we fit that profile of expectation?

Who was this good news for?

This was good news for people who felt the tension between:

- the goodness of creation
- the wonder and awe of life and beauty that we sample and touch at times
- the goodness of the God of Israel as creator and faithful shepherd on the one hand, and;
- the corruption of life in a fallen world dominated by evil powers and wicked people
- the frustration of God's good purposes for creation and humanity.

Do you know that tension?

It's knowing the beauty of truth amidst the power of lies

It is cosmic, it is global and it is personal.

We were made for glory but find ourselves broken and lost in every dimension.

Don't ever settle for it just being personal and about your personal sin. All of creation groans and the sensitive can hear that. The struggle with sin is cosmic.



In our day it's a tension that can lead people to the light or the dark side.

It can draw people to hope in God as the loving ground of our being and Father of all or to Atheism in some form. Many just don't face or resolve it and bumble on in agnosticism.

Some say wisdom is simply accepting this and settling for versions of yin and yang in serene detachment from it all. There are all manner of coping mechanisms on offer as living with the tension is not easy.

In Jesus' day Israel lived with a hope established by her prophets and her amazing talent for deep listening and reflection. She carried the expectation that God would somehow come and reign on earth. The Day of the Lord would come bringing righteousness for all.

Yes, Creator God, even though alienated by the rebellion of humanity would touch down and reign on earth to bring healing, restoration and righteousness from heaven to earth. Israel longed for God's saving judgement on the world caught up in evil it could not overcome.

Jesus was speaking to the people who felt the tensions and carried that hope.

You hear it in his prayer: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in Heaven"

We are hurting in the world's rebellion against heaven, bring your kingdom and reign among us.

We have heard your prophets, we have your Law and your Temple but we long for your reign in person.

Thy Kingdom come!

So with that expectation clear let's hear Jesus' first words again:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."

- Waiting is over. This is the fullness of time in which God has come.
- The reign of heaven you long for is 'at hand'

'At hand' is a phrase meaning imminent, suggesting you could reach out and touch it. In modern terms: close enough to take a selfie with it! That proximity is both physical and temporal –space and time. For people of expectation that should capture interest.

So we are now in the market with expectation. We want that promised Kingdom. I want God to reign. Give it to us. Let us have it. Save us from ourselves and rescue the world, please!

At this point we need to realise something about how God is bringing his Kingdom in Jesus.

Getting this point could change everything for you today and make Christmas ten times bigger than it is. Some where in the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Jesus is standing in Jewish province of the Roman Empire, a man with his feet on the earth, saying the long awaited kingdom of God in the world is close enough to take hold of.

Q: If you were there then to physically reach out your hand, what would you reach for in concrete terms?

A: The right place to reach for would be Jesus himself.



What is yet to become obvious but soon will is that he is the Reign of God. Jesus bears his Father's Kingdom as the true Son of God. St. Paul would later repeatedly spell this out but it's all about Jesus. Then John would say; he is God's only Word become flesh and come among us.

Several people would instinctively take hold of him to touch and receive God's salvation.

If we want God's reign on earth within us and among us, take hold of Jesus who came to be taken hold of. It is not about a new teaching or a new religion. It is not about more theology or rules for living. It's about receiving heaven's reign by taking hold of Jesus. That is the Gospel Jesus speaks in his first sentence.

Response and Application

So what does this require of us? What is involved? Again, in a few words Jesus tells us:

“repent and believe in the gospel.”³

So if Jesus is the Kingdom how do you engage that in him?

He demands two things.

The first is *metanoia* which means a radical change of mind. We translate this ‘repentance’ which people commonly tend to limit to ending sinful behaviour. We need to understand it more as a change of mind, a turning of the heart. Paul echoes this in saying; “Be renewed by the transformation of your mind.”⁴

Then having allowed your mind to be renewed, think serious ‘upgrade’ or ‘operating system’ change, believe in me as the bearer of the Kingdom that you have longed for.

He is not asking here to believe his teaching, or his patterns of prayer and worship or his piety. That will follow. Jesus is calling people to embrace a mind transformation and to trust him in this.

After this first recorded sentence many chapters will follow to illustrate and clarify what is involved. This is the ground for discipleship so in the verses that follow Jesus calls disciples to take hold of him and God's Kingdom.

One metaphor that Jesus used to describe this was ‘the way’. It's not unique to Jesus. He talked about the way to life in the Kingdom. Before Christians were called ‘Christians’ they were called ‘Followers of the

³ μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ.

⁴ Romans 12.2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Way' as referring to Jesus. In response to a question from Thomas, Jesus referred to himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life to spell out how he and the Father were one so if you want go God, go Jesus.⁵

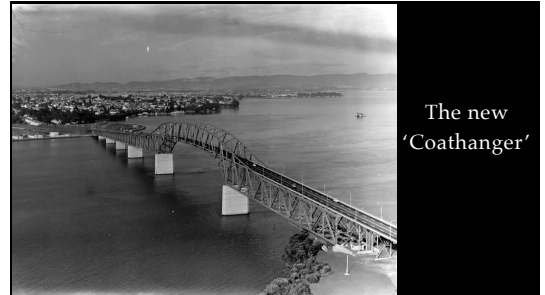
This has been so hard for many aspiring Christians to grasp.
It has always been a scandal and still is now.

Illustration

Let's make it concrete with an engineering illustration:

In 1959 a new road bridge was opened in New Zealand - the 'Auckland Harbour Bridge'. It was a 4 lane, kilometre-long steel bridge shaped like a coathanger.

This became 'the way' for north-south traffic.



Young Lynne Starrenburg was there on opening day and sent in this picture. The bridge linked her home over the water with the centre of Auckland city.

New Zealand believed in that bridge.

People all have bridges they believe in as their way of life.
Economically, spiritually, socially, ethically and so on.



Time rolled on and within 7 years the traffic volume was three times what it had been designed for. The upgrade plan settled for was to weld two more lanes on either side of the existing structure doubling the number of lanes from 4 to 8. The box sections were prefabricated in Japan and then welded on to the existing bridge so became known as the 'Nippon clip-ons'. Within 10 years the problems started and they have never fully been resolved. The welds showed small cracks and the risk of failure is constantly an issue. The clip-on lanes were not secure!

Now back to Jesus and his gospel:

He presents himself as the long awaited Kingdom of God come and calls people to do whatever it takes to take hold of him letting go of everything else and believing in him – "Repent and believe".

In bridge terms that is something like this:

⁵ John 14.5-7 ⁶ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁷ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁸ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

“The Way of the Kingdom is here. It’s me, Jesus. I am the way and the only way to God. You won’t find the Way in a Temple, in Scriptures or in the Law. They all point to me but it’s really me here - I am the way. *Totally Radical!*”

To take hold of me you need to do two things:

- a) Demolish your existing bridge, deconstruct your existing way, let it collapse, repent of it!
- b) Then, you need to take hold of me as your true and living way.

These are huge claims and potentially very offensive in their absoluteness.

Here is the thing to note whether you are a new Christian or have been in church for 100 years, What many people, cultures and nations often seem to do in responding to Jesus is add him to their existing bridge as a clip-on. Jesus is the capacity boost or a ‘Rush-hour Saviour’.

That is not what Jesus calls for and apparently not good engineering either!

He wants the old bridge removed and he himself embraced. Yes, just him on his word as God’s King.

That is what conversion looks like.

That is shifting from an inadequate bridge to God’s new Way as he provides in Christ.

That is what embracing the long awaited Kingdom of God requires – embracing Jesus alone.



Adding Jesus as a few extra lanes to our existing bridge is a recipe for strain and collapse yet the evidence of this abounds. How else can we explain how Christian nations or Christian individuals get it so wrong and seem oblivious to that? Many have a clip-on Jesus instead of their core bridge - their true way.

Conclusion:

Today we have heard the Gospel of Jesus from Jesus himself – God’s reign has arrived and is in reach. It might have been a bit different from what you grew up with or presently have in mind?

As Jesus himself would point out, he and his gospel are scandalous in what they claim and demand. How can we trust one person to be all that God has for us - even though Mark did cover that in his first verse and it's the consistent theme of the New Testament?

Take hold of Jesus let go of everything else.

I would say that that is Jesus’ definition of a Christian and the basis for Christian discipleship.

Has Jesus become your one true Way or is he a clip on for life’s high volume moments?

Prayers

Song of response: Knowing You Jesus