

The Sovereign Is Calling And I Must Go

Mark 1:12-20 February 19, 2025

Wilt Chamberlain made his NBA debut in October 1959. He dominated in college and delighted audiences during one season with the Harlem Globetrotters. But how would he do in the *big* leagues? At the end of his first game, Wilt left the court with 43 points and 28 rebounds.¹ Quite a rookie performance. And he *still* holds the record for more 40 point games 66 years later.

Last week Mark introduced Jesus. Socially speaking, He was an unknown. He had no political clout, no earthly certifications, no foot in the door with the Jerusalem elite. The people at the Jordan weren't there to see Jesus, there were there to see John. But none of that mattered because when He came up out of the water heaven itself split open to grab our attention and say, "*This* is the Messiah. Look at *Him*. Listen to *Him*." *This* was the One to behold.

So what would be Jesus' first act? Would He throw Caesar off the throne? Host a big fundraiser? Would He demand genuflection or commission a palace? All would've been within His rights as King of kings. What would His first act be?

We learn very quickly that *this* King is not like other kings. In this Gospel, He begins His work going into battle alone - *on our behalf* - and then inviting us to fall in line behind Him to enjoy the victory. He doesn't grind us down under His thumb, but lifts us up in His loving embrace.

Mark 1:12-13 - ¹²Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and the angels were serving him.

There's a sudden shift from verse 11 to verse 12. Mark makes fast movements in his writing. He's going to use this term "immediately" more than 40 times.² There is an urgency to the work of Christ culminating in His death and resurrection. He was on a mission, not a vacation.

As we read the other Gospel accounts it's easy to think that Satan came, threw out his 3 temptations, which takes less than 2 minutes when you read it right through, and then took off. But we see here an extended period of testing and conflict between the Lord and our Adversary.

The wilderness doesn't only speak to us of danger and isolation. It also proves an important point about Who Jesus is. You see, Moses had failed in the wilderness, due to frustration.³ Elijah failed in the wilderness, due to fear and despair.⁴ But Jesus did *not* fail.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilt_Chamberlain

² Ben Witherington *The Gospel Of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

³ Numbers 20:9-11

⁴ 1 Kings 19:4-5

Not only was Jesus doing what Elijah could not and what Moses could not, more significantly, Jesus conquered while Adam had surrendered. When Satan came and tempted Adam, he gave in. And *he* was defeated in the garden. A perfect garden where he was at home, where every need was met, where his perfect companion was constantly with them and together they communed with God Himself face-to-face. But Christ, the *Second* Adam faced an extended barrage of temptations in the *wilderness* alone. Hungry but with nothing to eat. Mark says angels were serving Him, but Matthew reveals they didn't arrive until *after* the Devil left.⁵

We're told that the Spirit drove Jesus into this situation. It was an absolute, Divine necessity that He go and prove that He was qualified to be the Savior.⁶ It's not that it was a question - God the Father wasn't wondering if Jesus would pass the test - but as Hebrews would later explain:

Hebrews 2:17-18 - ¹⁷**Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest in matters pertaining to God, to make atonement for the sins of the people.** ¹⁸**For since he himself has suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.**

He was tempted not only to show He had what it takes to defeat the Devil - something no human had *ever* been able to do - but to also so that He might sympathize with us in *our* weakness.⁷

And to think: This was Jesus' *rookie* performance. Usually you don't face the champ in your very first fight. But Jesus did and it wasn't even close. Total victory over ultimate temptation.

Mark 1:14 - ¹⁴**After John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God**

About a year passes in-between verses 13 and 14. The Gospel of John records that Jesus had an early Judean ministry that overlapped with John the Baptist's ministry - in fact, they may have been in the same general area.⁸

But Mark's Gospel has 3 major parts. You have the Galilean ministry in chapters 1 through 8. Then you have Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in from the last part of chapter 8 through 10. And then you have Passion week in chapters 11 through 16. The opening 13 verses of chapter 1 are an introduction and the last few verses of chapter 16 are an appendix.

Here in verse 14 the Galilee portion begins. Galilee is not just some random place. As one scholar points out, Galilee has both a *geographical* dimension and a *theological* dimension.⁹ It was a place where the barriers between Jew and Gentile started to break down. There were a lot of religious

⁵ Matthew 4:11

⁶ James Brooks *The New American Commentary, Volume 23: Mark*

⁷ Hebrews 4:15

⁸ John 3:22-26

⁹ Wilfrid Harrington *Reading Mark For The First Time*

Jews there, but it was also semi-pagan.¹⁰ Matthew calls it a *Gentile* district.¹¹ In this remarkable place, Jesus met all kinds of people and proclaimed the *Good News* to *all* of them. Salvation for *anyone*. And in coming to Galilee, Jesus fulfilled yet *another* Isaiah prophecy: that the Lord would bring light and freedom and joy to the people living in darkness - the people in *Galilee!*¹²

I couldn't help but wonder, "Why wasn't *John* one of the 12 apostles?" Wouldn't he have been an *incredible* addition to the team? Full of the Holy Spirit from the womb. A faithful Nazarene. A great preacher. Humble and fearless. Yet, he was "arrested." The term actually means "handed over into the power of men."¹³ It's the same word that will later be used when Jesus is betrayed by Judas.

Why wasn't John brought into the 12? We obviously don't know the mind of God, but we *do* know that, in His providence, God had set aside John to serve as the herald of the Messiah and to *maybe* use him as the "Elijah that was to come." Later in Mark we'll hear Jesus say, "Elijah does have to come before the end of human history, and John *could have been* Elijah, but he was rejected."¹⁴

You see, Christ's offer to Israel to restore her and establish the forever Kingdom was a *genuine* offer. But Israel's leaders, both political and religious, rejected Jesus, and so we now wait for the full and final consummation of the Messiah's work and the establishment of His physical Kingdom.

Mark 1:15 - ¹⁵"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

In the Garden of Eden, looking on the failure of man, the infiltration of sin and death into creation, the Lord made a promise to send a Son to defeat the Devil and save the world. And now, so many centuries later, the time had come. Not only were the gates of the Kingdom thrown open, but the arrival of Christ also signified the *beginning* of the end. Mark 1:15 is the start of the last days.¹⁵

The coming of the Kingdom *is* good news, but it isn't *only* good news. Along with the offer of salvation comes the promise of judgment. Those who refuse to enter in will face His inescapable wrath. And so, while sharing the happy tidings, Jesus also urgently invited people to enter in.¹⁶

From the beginning, He explained how to gain access to the eternal Kingdom of God: Repent and believe the good news. In those few words we see an entire life being oriented toward the truth of God in trust and obedience. You have the heart, the mind, and the actions all together moving the progress of a life from going in one direction to now going in another direction.

We don't earn a place in the Kingdom, we don't climb in by our own grit or ability. We are *invited* in by the King, Who loves us and wants very much to spend eternity with us. But to receive what God

¹⁰ Morna Hooker *The Gospel According To Saint Mark*

¹¹ Matthew 4:15

¹² Isaiah 9:1-2

¹³ Hooker

¹⁴ Mark 9:11-13 *paraphrased*

¹⁵ Franklin Paschall and Herschel Hobbs *The Teacher's Bible Commentary*

¹⁶ Luke 16:16

has offered, we must have an operational faith - belief *with* repentance. A faith that is not just intellectual - and not just emotional - but rooted in love, truth, and motion toward God. It's not just about words we say. In fact, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, "the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."¹⁷ And so, we must respond to Christ's urgent summons with a living, childlike faith.

Are we in the Kingdom now? Some Christians and church traditions teach that we are and shouldn't expect a physical manifestation of Christ's Kingdom in the future. And Jesus said, "The Kingdom has drawn near. It's at hand." But He would also go on to tell His disciples to pray, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Even later He will teach in His Olivet Discourse, "When you see the following things happening, you know the Kingdom is near."¹⁸

As Christians, we live in the reality of the Kingdom now in the sense that we know that this world is not our home, and that while we are passing through we are on a mission to further the King's work and bring more citizens to His Kingdom. At the same time, here at Calvary we are futurists who see the unfulfilled prophecies in the Bible, including those about a Millennial Kingdom, and recognize that just as the prophecies of Christ's *first* coming were literally fulfilled, so the prophecies about His *second* coming and the establishment of a Kingdom in Jerusalem will be literally fulfilled. And that belief *should* impact our plans, our values, the things we're excited about, and so much more.

In the meantime, I receive the Kingdom here and now by submitting to God's rule over my heart and life. I live a life defined by belief and repentance and trust in *this* Savior King Who has been revealed and Who works in and through my life as I walk with Him.

Mark 1:16 - ¹⁶As he passed alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew, Simon's brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen.

First thing Christ did after being introduced was fight a battle He didn't have to fight to so He could share with us a victory we couldn't win for ourselves. The second thing He did was go looking for disciples. This may seem like normal to us in a world full of brand ambassadors and military recruitment, but this was an unusual thing. Old Testament prophets didn't go looking for disciples. Most rabbis didn't either.¹⁹ John the Baptist *had* disciples, but they came to him. But Jesus is the Good Shepherd Who goes looking for lost sheep. He seeks after you. He calls out to you.

Now, normally we thinking of the fishermen of Galilee being a coarse and impoverished lot. But the truth is, they were *not* peasants. In fact, they would occupy what we might call the middle class, (relatively speaking).²⁰ But that doesn't mean Christianity is a middle-class movement. Jesus brought people of every background into His fold, as He continues to do today. Because the Gospel brings hope and transformation to *all* peoples of *all* places and social classes. Spiritually speaking, no matter who we are, we're blind, bankrupt, and in need of rescue. Jesus comes to us.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 4:20

¹⁸ Luke 21:31

¹⁹ David Garland *Mark*

²⁰ Craig Keener *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*

Mark 1:17 - ¹⁷“Follow me,” Jesus told them, “and I will make you fish for people.”

Jesus' was not like the other teachers of Scripture at the time. The other rabbis of Israel would *not* say “follow *ME*,” they would say, “Come learn the Torah from me.”²¹ And when Jesus talked about fishing for people, it would've reminded these Jewish fellows about that same image used in the Old Testament prophets. But *there*, fishing for people led to wrath and judgment. Here, Jesus says, “I'm going to send you to fish for people *to save them from wrath and judgment.*”

His call to them may only have been 10 words, but there could not have been anything more transformational, radical, or demanding. This was a *command* from the Son of God. But with the command came a promise. To receive that promise, they must go along with Christ's demands - and He demanded *everything*. “Fall in line behind Me, come after Me, *wherever* I lead you.” But, if they were willing to follow, He *would* lead them into a greater life and experience than they could've possibly imagined.

Mark 1:18 - ¹⁸Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Look at this! Incredible faith. Incredible obedience. Immediate trust and belief in practice.

With that said, the Gospels are full of examples of the disciples making profound mistakes. They're not recorded to shame them, but to help us. But you have to wonder, why not just pick those angels from verse 13 to be the Messiah's entourage? Angels don't misunderstand. Angels can't be imprisoned. Angels don't fear or falter. Humans do. But it is God's desire to redeem us and sanctify us and make us His own special possession to be put on display for all the cosmos to see His power and grace and mercy and faithfulness. We are chosen *despite* our failures and weakness.

Mark 1:19-20 - ¹⁹Going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat putting their nets in order. ²⁰Immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

These brothers would make up the core four of Jesus' disciples. Though we'll see their obedience was definitely not perfect, it was prompt and complete here at the start.²²

What enticed them to go? They saw no miracle. They *may* have known something about Jesus, but Mark gives us no such indication. They were propelled by Christ's authority and Word. His word and presence were *powerful* despite there being no supernatural manifestation.

And so they left their own plans, they left their own designs, they left their human father to be led by Jesus, and lead Him He did, through thick and thin, ups and downs, failures and triumphs. Christ was *always* faithful to them. And His desire was to lead each of these fellows in very specific, and in some cases very *different* ways.

²¹ Garland

²² Brooks

James would be a relatively early martyr for Christ in Jerusalem. Peter would become a leader in the Jerusalem church and, ultimately, be led to Rome. John would become the bishop of Ephesus, be exiled to Patmos, and receive the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Andrew “went as far as the borders of Russia” with the good news.²³

They didn’t know any of that that day as the water lapped the shore by their nets. But they believed that not only was Jesus worth serving, He was going to *lead* them for the rest of their lives.

Christ’s introduction in this chapter shows us so much about Him *and* about the life He’s called us to. Through this book, we see that Jesus has also sought *you* out and said to you, “Follow Me.” And He really, actually, wants *you* involved in His work and His Kingdom. He *could* use angels. He *could* find other John the Baptists. But He wants *you* and me to come after Him and be sent into a specific life of faith and power and grace and truth. One where we can overcome temptation because our Savior overcame every temptation. One where we continue to be renewed in our belief and built up in our faith by God the Holy Spirit, living under the protection of the Most High, dwelling in the shadow of the Almighty. A life where the King of kings brings us into His Kingdom and shares all He has with us. A life we get to walk in as we exercise our faith, grow in our knowledge and understanding of Christ Jesus our Lord, and wait with expectation and hope for all that He will accomplish by His power on our behalf.

²³ R. Kent Hughes *Mark: Jesus, Servant, And Savior*