

“Time’s Up!”

Mark 1:14-20

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.” 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. (ESV)

Last week we began looking at this Book. It was sort of odd, certainly, if you’re unfamiliar with the Bible. It was odd because you had this guy John the Baptist come, dressed in camel’s hair, eating locust, and calling Israel out into the wilderness, sort of through the waters of judgment, to this baptism for the repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Then, one person comes from Galilee. Remember, everyone was coming from Judah and Jerusalem, but one representative came from Galilee. “Galilee of the Gentiles” was sort of the unclean section of Israel. His name, of course, was Jesus. It’s odd because Jesus is baptized by John. The question is, “Why?” It’s a baptism of repentance. It’s a baptism with the forgiveness of sins in mind. Why would Jesus be baptized? The answer is: Jesus didn’t need to be baptized, at least for Himself. Jesus underwent this baptism as our representative, and not just as our representative but in order to identify with us. So, He not only identifies with us, but we also looked at (at least in the evening I expanded on that) Jesus going into the wilderness.

Jesus did at least three things. Jesus lived the life that Adam should have lived. Remember, Adam was placed into paradise and by his sin he created a wilderness. Jesus went into the wilderness and creates a paradise. Jesus also lived the life Israel should have lived. He goes through the waters of judgment and out into the wilderness to be tested, and unlike Israel who brought anxiety and alienation upon themselves, He brought harmony. But bigger than all that, at least practically speaking, is Jesus lived the life that you and I should have lived. In Mark’s gospel he goes from one thing to another very quickly. Mark is the patron saint of those with ADHD. So, he immediately switches to something else (that’s the word he constantly uses).

I was thinking through this and I thought, “How do you get across what this is about?” My girls ask me about my life when I was growing up (they often do because they know it was so different than theirs). They’ll ask me, “What was it like when you were in the Army? What was it like when you did this?” They’ve heard the stories a hundred times and they still want to hear them again. This week they asked, “Tell us again what it was like when you were in high school.” I thought, “I need to come up with a different angle on what I usually tell them.” I said, “Girls, high school for me was a time of expectation.” They asked, “What do you mean?” “Every day on the first day of class I would sit in class at the very back if I could, and I would look forward and see the big year calendar that the teacher had on the wall. It started in September and went all the way through to June, and I would focus and visualize, and envision the very last day of school. Every year I would just sit in class and contemplate what it will be like when that day finally came. Every minute in between I focused on every single tick of the clock. I don’t know if they still have them in schools, the huge clocks that every single minute if you can hear it (which I can) goes shick-POOM, shick-POOM, shick-POOM. My whole being was focused not just on the last day, but on that last tick of the clock when it would go shick---POOM. Three months’ reprieve from this waste of my time (I thought)! “Do as I say, not as I did, by the way, for all you kids out there. So that expectation – you look forward to the time it finally comes.

When we look at today’s text, Jesus finally starts His ministry, and that’s what it’s all about. Jesus’ preaching and His whole announcement is basically that. For all of you with expectations, the clock has now ticked. It’s the last

day of school. It's the last hour, the last stroke has happened. Now it is come and what are you going to do? The thing you've been waiting for, the thing you've been longing for, the thing you've been envisioning and hoping for your whole life has arrived. What now?

We're going to look at two things at least this morning. We're going to look at Jesus' preaching. The content of His preaching is basically composed of an announcement. If you're a note-taker point one is: an announcement. The second point is: an appeal. So, He gives an announcement and He gives an appeal. What is His announcement? Look at verse 14 and 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 . . ." (ESV)

That's His announcement. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." Before we look at the announcement, though, it's helpful to understand the context. That's one of those things that's easy to skip over. Did you notice the context of this, or the timing? "Now after John was arrested." I've told you in Mark's gospel most references to geography and most references to chronology are actually revolving around theology. "After John was arrested, Jesus came preaching." Why did Jesus wait until after John was arrested? Why didn't He immediately come out of the wilderness and begin preaching? The honest answer is no one knows for sure. In Mark's gospel John is arrested by Herod in chapter 8 because he confronts him about some marital issues, and Jesus waits until after John is arrested before He starts his ministry. But what we do know is that when Jesus starts His ministry, there's no confusion about who "The Man" is. John had a very successful preaching ministry. He was very popular, he was very well known, and once he was in jail he was completely off of the scene. That's when Jesus started because there is no competitor. I also want you to notice the geography where Jesus began His preaching ministry. Remember at His baptism there was one representative that came from Galilee, the sort of unclean section of Israel where people would have looked down on them. They would have been on the other side of the tracks. When Jesus begins His preaching ministry, if He was like everyone else in those days or even in these days, where would you go? If you were a preacher and you have something to say, wouldn't you go to Jerusalem, or wouldn't you go to the biggest church or the biggest synagogue? Instead Jesus goes back to the unclean section, Galilee of the Gentiles, and that's where He begins His ministry. What you see in Mark over and over again is that Jesus always pursues those on the outside. He seeks the outsiders; He seeks those who are not the religious, but the irreligious. So, that's where He begins His ministry. It says He comes and begins "proclaiming the gospel of God."

What is the gospel of God? It's the announcement and the appeal. The first thing it says is "The time is fulfilled." What does He mean when He says, "The time is fulfilled?" There are at least three ways to read this. Probably there is something to be said for all of them. The first is maybe in the broad sense of the time being fulfilled, all the way back in the book of Genesis, where Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden and God came to discipline. The first thing he says to the serpent is, "The seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent and the serpent will bruise His heel." In other words, "Adam and Eve, you completely screwed this whole thing up but I promise you I will fix it. The One who will fix it will be one of your children, your seed." It's instructive, by the way, to remember what Adam and Eve's first son was named. It was "Cain," which in Hebrew means, "Here he is." They expected that God was going to save the world through Cain. Cain didn't work out too well. If you just follow through the Old Testament, God calls Abraham and what does he say to him? "Abraham, I'm calling you so that your seed can be a blessing to all peoples." He tested King David. "King David, one of your sons is going to rule on your throne forever. That's all coming, I promise you." Israel is dispersed, they're completely scattered and God says through all the prophets, "I promise you I will bring you home. I will come and I will restore all things and I will bring you back." When Jesus says, "The time is fulfilled," that is one way

to read this. Right now is the time that all the promises of God are coming to fruition, right now, in Me. Pretty bold!

Another way to read this when he says, “The time is fulfilled,” might have had something to do with John. “John the Baptist is gone and I’m here now.” In other words, the time is fulfilled in that the time for pointing is over. The time of reality has arrived. John the Baptist came and only pointed to the One who would come. He was a sign. He pointed and said, “That’s the one. I’m not the one; He’s the one.” And Jesus says, “The time of pointing is over, the time is fulfilled because the reality has arrived. God’s promised deliverer is here on the scene.”

The final way, the third way, to read this is that basically Jesus is saying, “The jig is up.” In other words, “It’s decision time.” God promised He is going to deliver you, He promised you He’s going to save you from your sins, He’s going to gather everyone in, and now is the time to ask yourself, “Are you going to embrace that?” It’s decision time. Now is the time, not sometime later, but right now. The time is fulfilled. How do we know the time is fulfilled? Because He says, “The kingdom of God is at hand.”

What does He mean when He says, “The kingdom of God” If you’ve ever studied theology or been to seminary there have probably been hundreds of books written, maybe thousands on how to understand or explain “the kingdom of God.” I’m going to try and make it simple for you because that’s how I have to understand it myself. When Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is at hand” what is He talking about? The easiest way to get your head around it, I think, is if you think about the Lord’s Prayer. “Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” So what does it mean when Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is here”? It has to do, I think, in some ways with what we understand when we pray the Lord’s Prayer. If you imagine what heaven is like (or don’t imagine what heaven is like, because you can only speculate about some things). But, if you know what heaven is like (at least according to the Bible), we know that in heaven there is complete reconciliation between creature and Creator. There is no alienation. There are no more tears. There is no brokenness. Everything is perfect. God rules completely and utterly and those who are there with Him worship Him completely and utterly. That’s how it is in heaven. So, heaven is defined by worship and obedience and reconciliation, and earth is defined in large part by what? Disobedience. Alienation. Brokenness. Hardship. So when we pray that, we’re praying that, “God, your will would be done here as it is there.” When Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is at hand” what He is saying is, “The way it is there is actually here right now. It’s at hand in My person.” Jesus is the One who brings this reconciliation. He’s the One who initiates or inaugurates the kingdom of heaven here on earth. I don’t mean that in some kind of way where we’re going to take over the government. What I’m saying is that the heaven I’m speaking about is this reconciliation with God, this removal of alienation, this dealing with brokenness, this dealing with sins. Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is here and your sins will be dealt with because I am the One who will deal with them. Remember my baptism, remember the wilderness. I lived the life you should have lived and I will die the death you should die.” The question is, “What are you going to do with that?” Do you want that, do you want reconciliation with God or do you not? Do you feel a need for reconciliation with God? Jesus said, “That is at hand right now.” When Jesus came, He basically inaugurated this time when He would undo everything that Adam did in the fall. That’s His announcement.

Now, what’s His appeal? The appeal comes next, and it’s pretty simple. His appeal is just this. He says, “Repent and believe in the gospel.” What does it mean to repent? We talked about it last week. In some sense it’s like that sweet, little old lady who was driving the wrong way down Benson in a snowstorm. You want to yell for her to stop where she’s going and turn the other way, otherwise great harm will come to her. That’s true. We tend to think about repentance in negative terms. “You need to stop being bad. You need to stop doing bad things or stop thinking bad thoughts. Repent of them.” There’s an element to that but there is also something bigger.

Repentance at its bottom-line level means simply, “coming home.” Come home. You were created to be in a relationship with God. You were created to live in a relationship that was reconciled, not alienated, and what Jesus is saying is, “Come home.” When John preached repentance, he wasn’t just telling people to stop being bad, he was calling Israel back to the wilderness, back to reinitiate this relationship with God. So, the question is, “Will you come home?” By the way, Jesus here is not asking, He’s telling you, “Come home.” Then He also says, “Believe in the gospel. Believe in this good news.” A lot of people make a big to-do about whether you can believe without repenting or repent without believing. That’s just a spurious argument and it’s a waste of time to even discuss it in many ways because the question is, “If you really believe this good news, if you really believe that God has given you everything you need in the person of Jesus, if you really believe that when Jesus went to the cross He took every bit of your sin and gave you every bit of His righteousness and God calls you to come home, how could you not repent? It’s a hypothetical argument to think they could be separated, because if Jesus has really done this how could you not want it? The only reason you would repent is if you really believed it. But if you are repenting or being good in order to somehow gain God’s favor you’re missing the boat here because you can’t gain God’s favor by your repentance. You can’t gain His favor by your belief. All you can do is receive God’s favor, by both of those two things combined, believing and coming home and embracing the work of Jesus. Is that where you are? Some of you I’m guessing are not Christians. Have you ever thought about that? That God want you to come home. He doesn’t want you to be good. That comes later.

I’m going to close with this. Did you notice where Jesus goes to preach this message? He goes to Galilee. Notice the first people that He calls to Himself. It’s easy, especially if you’ve been in church a long time to not even notice this. But, did you notice the names of those two people that he called—the very first ones? Let me read it to you.

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. (ESV)

Now, if you lived a few thousand years ago and you were Jewish and you read that, you would be horrified. Why? Because although we know Simon and Andrew were Jewish, their names are not Jewish. Simon and Andrew are Greek names. In other words, that tells us that even if Simon and Andrew were not religious, we know their families were not, because if their families were religious and strict Jews they would have never named them with Greek names. Jesus goes to the other side of the tracks and He doesn’t go to the place where you would normally go to get people to help you out if you needed to start a ministry. If you were going to start a ministry, where would you go? If you were smart you would go to Reformed Seminary (where I went). You would go somewhere and you would seek out the best students with the best pedigree. We do that today. Back then you wouldn’t have done that. In the days of Jesus the best students with the best pedigrees would go seek out the best teachers and ask them to let them follow them. In other words it would be the equivalent what we do with SAT scores. You try to get the best SAT scores and the best transcripts that you can, and then you apply to a college in hopes that they would accept you. The best students would go and appeal to the best teachers and say, “Would you please let me study under you, study the law?” Unlike other rabbis, Jesus doesn’t wait for students to come to Him, Jesus goes and pursues the students. Fortunately Jesus pursues students like me, the ones who didn’t like school very much, the ones who didn’t do very well in school. In fact He pursues fishermen, that are probably not particularly religious, just by way of their names we know that. What does he ask of them? He says, “Follow me!” And then He makes them a promise, “I will make you become fishers of men.” Think about that.