

The Kingdom of God: Are you in?

Mark 1: 14-28

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.

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

Jesus begins his ministry with the announcement of the Kingdom of God being at hand. What does this mean? That is an important question to answer, yet a difficult one to answer simply. The Kingdom of God encompasses many important ideas in the Bible. There are at least two major phases of God’s plan for humanity that this phrase can be used to refer to: 1. The current phase of the Kingdom of God during which Satan has been defeated and sin has been paid for by Christ on the Cross and NOW all who desire to be citizens of his Kingdom can come into this Kingdom through repentance and by trusting in the work of Jesus on the Cross. This is called “being born again” or “being saved.” In this phase of the Kingdom, we co-exist with people on earth who are not citizens of this Kingdom, and part of our role in this Kingdom is to actively invite them to join us. I’m getting ahead of myself there, however. For now, I just want us to look at what the Kingdom of God is. It is the current, invisible (according to Luke 17:20) Kingdom that flows from the earthly work of Jesus, especially his work on the Cross, that people enter into through being born again.

There is ANOTHER phase of this kingdom that is sometimes in view when the writers of the Bible speak of the Kingdom of God, and that is the future rule of Christ on the earth when all other earthly kingdoms will cease to exist and the invisible kingdom of God will become visible and endure forever.

The Kingdom of God is currently an invisible kingdom made up of citizens who have joined by repenting and being born again.

Jesus’s announcement of the Kingdom of God is an invitation to come and be a part of this great and eternal kingdom. Entrance into the Kingdom is through repentance and believing the Gospel. Citizenship is eternal, and although it may result in temporary difficulties, the King of this Kingdom will reward each citizen with eternal joy beyond anything we’ve ever experienced.

But it's important to note that there is only one way in. You can't become a citizen of this Kingdom on your terms, or any way you like. There is only one way to become a member.

This isn't nflshop.com where anyone can get the same gear the pros wear. Remember those commercials? If you watched any NFL games this past year, you probably saw one of those commercials where a well-known NFL player would talk about what he had to go through to earn the honor of wearing his team's official gear. You know, "I had to catch 10,000 passes, memorize a hundred playbooks, get a dozen concussions, etc. to earn the right to wear this shirt." And then the camera pans back and there's a scrawny, 12-year old kid with the exact same shirt and he says, "my mom got this for me on nflshop.com".

If you want to be in this Kingdom, then you have to come in the way that the King commands. Yes, it is by grace that we are saved, but it is a grace that results in repentance and belief. If you have not repented of your sins, believed in the work of Jesus on the Cross and been born again, then you are not a citizen of this Kingdom.

After this announcement of the Kingdom, Mark shows us some important things about life in this Kingdom by telling us what Jesus did next. There are three things we're going to look at here.

First, Jesus collects FOLLOWERS.

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.

So, here's something Mark wants us to know about the kingdom:

In the Kingdom of God, Jesus calls people to follow Him.

The very first thing Mark tells us about Jesus's public ministry is that He calls four men to stop what they are doing and follow Him. Mark gives us next to no information about the conversation or circumstances He called them from. We are simply told that these men were fishermen, and as such, they were out fishing. They were working and trying to make a living. Jesus says to the first set of brothers, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."

1. These are ordinary men. This is not surprising to us because we've heard the story many times, and because we know from the rest of the story that Jesus always associates with such people. Here's what we know so far: this remarkable man, John the Baptist, makes a BIG deal out of Jesus and tells people to prepare for His coming by repenting of their sins. Then, God himself speaks audibly from Heaven and declares that this Jesus is His son! After this, Satan takes it on himself to stop this man, Jesus, by tempting Him out in the wilderness, but Jesus resists him and angels come and minister to Him. This guy is a big deal, and surprisingly, He approaches some of the most ordinary and unremarkable men that He could find and invites them to come follow Him.

2. He invites them to learn a new skill; to become fishers of men. Jesus isn't looking for spectators, or even cheerleaders. He's not assembling an entourage of mindless followers who are there just to there to get

people's attention. He is inviting these men to be a part of the most important band of brothers ever to walk the earth. These are the men through whom God will turn the world upside down, and yet they are completely insignificant in the eyes of the world.

3. They follow. They walk away from their jobs and families and go with Jesus. We know from Luke's account that there was a lot more to this invitation than what Mark chooses to include in his account here. Here's Luke's account:

Luke 5: 1-11 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, ² and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." ⁶ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. ⁷ They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." ⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." ¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

With these details added to the story, we can see that Jesus reveals Himself to these men and they follow.

Jesus calls them and they drop what they are doing, leave their job, and leave their father (in the case of James and John) to do their work, and they follow Him. Other men, as we will see later in Mark, would desire to follow Jesus, but only if Jesus would meet their conditions. Like the rich young ruler who wouldn't part with his wealth, or the men in **Luke 9:57-62**

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹ To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹ Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Many throughout Jesus' earthly life would have the opportunity to follow Him, but would find the conditions of such a commitment to be disagreeable. They would choose to not follow Him, and they missed out on the Kingdom of God. And so it is today.

But these four men, who were there essentially from the very beginning of Jesus's ministry, would be with Him until the very end. They would go on to follow Him everywhere He went. They would witness His suffering and His resurrection. They would later see Him ascend to Heaven and be there to receive the Holy Spirit and take the message of Jesus into the world. And it all began with Jesus calling them to leave their fishing boats and follow Him.

When Jesus called me to follow Him, I was 16 years old. The weight and consequences of my sin overwhelmed me and drove me to my knees (literally) to seek His forgiveness and His help. The way He administered His mercy and forgiveness to me convinced me to follow Him without any concern of what the cost would be. I had seen enough to know I was in.

That was the response of these four men that had NO answers to some really important questions, but they had seen enough, and they were ready to follow.

Jesus is calling people to follow Him today. He's looking for people who will take up their cross and follow Him. He's looking for people who will count everything else as secondary. He's looking for people who want to become fishers of men!

There are no mere spectators in this Kingdom, only followers.

In the Kingdom of God, Jesus calls people to follow Him.

Next, Mark tells us that Jesus began teaching in a synagogue:

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.

Jesus's teaching surprises them because He teaches with authority. There was an authority in His teaching and in His tone that was unique among them. They had heard people speak intelligently about God before, but this was more than that. They had heard people speak convincingly before, but this was more than that. They had heard people exposit the Scriptures before, but this was more than that. Jesus had an authority that ASTONISHED them.

That authority was the authority of God Himself. Jesus teaches them with authority because he HAS authority. He has the authority of God because He is God. And God's Word is the highest level of authority that exists. John helps us with this in his account of Jesus's ministry:

John 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made...

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus' words have authority because they are the very words of God. In fact, HE is the very Word of God. He is God! The authority they were astonished by was the authority of God Himself.

And so Mark is showing us that:

In the Kingdom of God, Jesus's Word is THE authority.

And when we say Jesus's Word, we're ultimately talking about the whole Bible, which was written by Him through many authors through the inspiration of His spirit, the Holy Spirit. Every book of the Bible carries the same authority as any other part. Sure, each part needs to be understood and interpreted properly. Some parts aren't even supposed to be obeyed, believe it or not. But the same authority that Jesus speaks

with is the same authority that Moses, David, Jeremiah, Paul, Peter, James, etc. all speak with because it is the same Spirit who guided them all.

2 Peter 1:21 ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16 ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness

Hebrews 4:12 ¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

In the Kingdom of God, people live under the authority of His Word. The Bible is the inspired Word of God, and it is our ultimate authority. No human being nor institution is above or equal to the word of God in authority. His Word is our guide, our law, and our manual.

So, I have to ask you here, are you valuing the Word of God? Are you looking to His Word, learning from His Word, and seeking to obey and live by His Word?

In the Kingdom of God, Jesus's word is THE authority.

While Jesus is in the synagogue and teaching with authority, this happens: 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.”** ²⁵ **But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!”** 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.**

Some quick observations from this passage, and then the main point: The first thing we can say here is that there is a spirit dimension to our world. Mark has already spoke of the Holy Spirit that descended on Jesus at His baptism. He has told us that Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness and that angels appeared to minister to Jesus, either after or during the temptation. And now we meet a man with an unclean spirit, which is just another name for demons. Although the physical dimension of our world is perhaps more obvious to us, the spiritual dimension of our world is just as real and actually more important in the sense that it is permanent, and is where our eternal fate is being decided.

Another observation is that this demon, or unclean spirit, that we are introduced to here is possessing a human being, and no one seems surprised by this. What they are surprised at is that the unclean spirit obeys Jesus's command.

The next observation is that this demon knows EXACTLY who Jesus is. Everyone there knew that this was Jesus of Nazareth, but the demon recognized Him as more than just a man named Jesus who came from Nazareth. He recognizes him as “the Holy One of God.” It's like a scene from Scooby Doo when the gang has finally cornered the criminal who has dressed up like a scary creature and harassed people, and now they are

going to remove his or her mask and reveal who he or she truly is. Except in Scooby Doo, it's always human beings pretending to be supernatural creatures, but in this case we have the supernatural dressed up as a human being. But anyhow, the demon sees past the human frame and knows that this is no ordinary human, this is God's holy Son. He recognizes this man's authority and has no trouble identifying who this really is. He has known Jesus his entire existence, because Jesus created him and it was against Jesus that he rebelled and was cast down from Heaven. He knows who he is and he's not thrilled that Jesus has caught up to him here in this synagogue.

You may remember James 2:19: ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

This brings us to the main point that I want to make from this passage: **In the Kingdom of God, Jesus commands even the demons.**

This demon had a good thing going for himself. He found a nice place to hang out and do his evil work of harassing and hurting the humans that God had created in His image. He was more powerful than they were, and so he seems free to do as he pleases. However, then appears one more powerful than he, one who is infinitely more powerful than he, the one whom he despises most: the Holy One of God. He has no choice but to obey.

And so let me recap some things we're seeing regarding the kingdom of God:

It's an invisible Kingdom right now that is made of citizens who have joined by repenting and believing (being born again).

In this Kingdom, Jesus is calling us to follow Him, His Word is our authority, and in this Kingdom, He commands even the demons.

So, the **most important question** to be asked in light of all of this is: **Are you in?**

Jesus said, ""The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel."

The Gospel is the great news that Jesus came and died for your sins so that you could be a part of His Kingdom, which will last forever. He's calling you to repent and believe (to be born again). Do you need to do that today?

If you've already done that, are you a follower or a spectator? If Jesus asked you to leave everything right now for the sake of following Him, would you drop your net and follow, or is there something you won't give up? Jesus never stopped and waited on those who said they needed more time, and He never tried to convince those who were holding tightly to other things. He simply worked with the ones who were ready to follow. Are you ready today?