

A Study of Mark's Gospel – March 5, 2017

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Remarkable Sermon Series

A few weeks ago I had the chance to travel w/a handful of pastors
To Lebanon w/World Vision to see firsthand reality of Syrian refugee crisis

The numbers themselves are staggering:

Nearly 2 million refugees have streamed over the mountains of Syria
Into a country half the size of Maryland

With a population 5 years ago of 4 million people

Many of the refugees have lost husbands, sons, children **[Pic 1]**

At the hands of the Syrian regime or attacks from ISIS

And they've come, terrified, grieving, with the clothes on their back **[Pic 2]**

And children in their arms to a country deeply unprepared for their arrival

The majority of these refugees are women and children **[Pic 3]**

80% of the kids have no access to education

Apart from the help of organizations like World Vision

They wouldn't have access to basics like clean water & latrines (many don't)

The average length of time a refugee is in a camp like this is 17 years

The affects of this crisis are going to be multigenerational

The majority of these refugees have no interest coming here, or Europe **[Pic 4]**

They just want to go home, to their family land, to what they know

Many of them still carry house keys in hopes that one day

They can return to Syria

These are normal people who got up & fled & are living in these conditions

In one of the tent settlements I visited

I met a young man named Abdul Kareem **[Pic 5]**

When my friend Daniel and I came across Abdul

He was sitting in a bucket in the middle of a muddy walkway in his camp

His mother said he has half-paralyzed and epileptic

Though he was 12, he looked like he was 8

And as we got permission to take his picture, we laid our hands on him
And asked the Lord Jesus to show mercy to this little boy

As we got back on the bus, I thought about what I had just experienced
Here I am, near the banks of the Mediterranean
In a village of people who are living hand to mouth
Trusting God for safety, daily provisions & a miracle for the sick among them

And I realized at that moment that 200 miles south, 2000 years ago
Someone else walked into a village of people living hand to mouth
Trusting God for safety, daily provision & a miracle for the sick among them

It was in communities not unlike the one I visited in Lebanon
That the Lord Jesus began his ministry

The prophet Isaiah foretold that before the coming of the Messiah
God would send a messenger, a forerunner, a herald
One who'd proclaim, "Someone's coming after me you won't want to miss!"

It was John the Baptist who came, calling people to repent
To prepare for the coming of God's chosen one

And so, as a way of putting ourselves into God's story
We observe this period of repentance, of Lent, beginning w/Ash Wednesday
When followers of Jesus everywhere reflect, humble ourselves
And prepare to celebrate Resurrection & the victory of our king over KOdark

And as we open Mark's gospel this morning (& start this new sermon series)
We enter on a gripping scene, where Jesus is making his public debut
He comes to John to be baptized
He who never sinned submitted to a baptism of repentance on our behalf
And this marks the launch of Jesus' ministry

Mark 1:9-15 (Pew Bible, p. 1552)

At that time, Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased.'

It was like God the Father ripped open the skies to get a glimpse at Jesus

“Wow, I’m so proud of him. Look at what he’s doing. That’s my boy.”

(v12) At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals and angels attended him.

Jesus’ baptism in water was followed by a baptism by fire

He went from a great high point, receiving the affirmation of his Father
And the blessing of the Spirit to a place of complete & utter solitude

What’s the longest amount of time you’ve spent alone?

No people, no phone, no internet, no connection with others

It has an affect on you (consider effects of solitary confinement on inmates)

It can get lonely and even scary to be alone with your own thoughts

And Jesus was alone for 40 days on the front side of his kingdom ministry

Literally being tempted and tested by the devil

Who must have been petrified of what was coming

So he threw every trick up his sleeve at Jesus trying to get him

To take shortcuts, to betray his nature, to sidestep his mission

And Jesus passed the test; And now it was time to get to work.

(v14) After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

And what was the good news of God that Jesus proclaimed?

(v15) ‘The time has come,’ he said, ‘The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.’”

Think about what’s happening:

Not since God literally walked with Adam & Eve in the cool of the day

Has God walked among his people in such an approachable way

God had come in fire and smoke and *shekinah* glory at Sinai & the Temple

And when this happened, people quaked in fear, even fell down dead

But here God is, in flesh and blood, among his people

And what did he have to say? What was his message? It was twofold:

First: “The time has come.” – The wait is over.

What the Moses and the Law foreshadowed, what the Prophets foretold
All of the promises of God, going back as far as the day
Adam & Eve were kicked out of the garden when God promised
To crush the head of serpent who deceived God's people were being fulfilled

Second: "The KOG has come near"

What this means, more than anything, is that the KING has come near.
And he's establishing his kingdom, his reign, wherever he goes.
Ever see a movie where a person in a foreign country runs to a US embassy?
Though they're in the middle of Russia or somewhere like that
As soon as they cross the threshold of the building, they're on US soil
Wherever he goes, people are standing on Kingdom soil, b/c the King is there

You see, more than anything, HE was the message he proclaimed
The good news of the kingdom is the good news of the KING.
Christ the King was among his people and was inaugurating
His kingdom offensive in the earth
He was coming to, as the Jesus Storybook Bible says,
"Make all the sad things come untrue."
He was here to destroy the devil's work & to roll back the affects of our sin

The scriptures give immediate witness to this:

After enlisting his first class of apprentices
He was casting out demons & healing sick & making friends w/serial sinners
And was embodying in his very being a message of good news
For the sick, the stranger, the poor, the outcast and the suffering
All of the things you'd hope would happen if God showed up happened.

But you know what I think may be Jesus' most profound miracle?

The disciples he left behind.
Sure, healing the leper and making the lame walk, I mean, incredible.
But transformation of those men/women was nothing short of extraordinary

They were a mixed bag from the beginning:

Fishermen, tax collectors, political activists, tradesmen
There's no indication that Jesus chose them b/c they had that special spark

And yet, when we read the story of their lives in scripture
We hear how they ended up doing the same kind of things Jesus did
They were healing, performing miracles, sharing the good news of KOG
And at great cost – all of the original disciples but John died as martyrs

What had happened to them? What was the common denominator?

More than anything: *They had been with Jesus.*

One of the first times after Jesus' ascension that they testified before authorities:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

For three years, these men had been Jesus' apprentices.

If you apprenticed to an electrician, you'd be learning to do what they do

If you apprenticed to a master woodworker, you'd be learning their craft

If you take up Jesus' invitation to apprentice him (like disciples had)

Did you know that his hope is that we'd be able to do what HE does?

That he wants to equip us to be like him?

That's the goal of discipleship (not mastering Bible trivia/perfect attendance)

Jesus wants us to walk closely w/him thru the everydayness of our life

Learning *from* him how to be *like* him wherever we live, work or play

He wants to so train/transform us (just like the original disciples)

That when you walk into the hospital as a nurse or courtroom as a lawyer

Or the school as a student or nursery as a parent it's like he's doing it himself

He wants us to have such intimacy w/us that he has all access to us (& us to him)

Jesus said: The time has come (the world's been waiting for this)

The kingdom—ah, the KING—has come near. And he wants to be near to us.

He's got open slots for apprentices. Do you want to sign up?

Jesus was prophesied by Isaiah, announced by John, affirmed by God the Father

Tested by the devil in the desert, proven by his miracles

Glorified in his resurrection/ascension, proclaimed by his disciples (to death)

And yet too often in church, we treat Jesus like someone we went to HS w/:

“Yeah, I met him when I was 16, but I haven’t really talked to him since.”

The reality is that for many of us, aside from the cross

We honestly have little practical use *for* or interest *in* Jesus

“I gave him my heart like preacher said. What else am I supposed to do?”

And I think in part that really is the fault of preachers like me

Who so emphasize forgiveness of sins (which was CRITICAL part of ministry)

But we’ve done so at the expense of the GOAL of Jesus ministry

Which was multiplication—establishing the KOG by creating “mini-me’s”

He didn’t just want to wipe out the negative forces, the guilt/shame of our sin

He wanted to unleash the positive force of men/women transformed

Into KINGDOM AMBASSADORS, joining him in establishing his rule on earth

And he does that by inviting us to pull up a chair, to become his apprentices

To be with him to learn from him how to live like him.

Do you want to do that? Do you honestly want to?

You may not. You may be content with coming to church, being polite/moral

But if Jesus is asking you this morning, “Do you want to be my apprentice?”

What would be your answer?

The truth is that it’s not particularly glamorous work. In fact, it can be quite ugly.

But if your intent is to apprentice Jesus

Turn off the TV. Turn off your phone. Set aside a few quiet hours.

Open your Bible. Read the Gospels and then read them again (and again).

Study Jesus. Look at him. Watch his every move.

As you read, ask him to teach you to be like him. Do that & keep doing that.

Can you imagine the impact if 5 people in our church said “YES” to X’s invitation?

Look at what happened when ONE Jesus came 2000 years ago?

What’d happen if he multiplied himself among people called Asbury by 5?

The reward is great, but it will cost us everything.

Jesus said: “Anyone who wants to *save his life* will lose it.

But anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.”

He also said: “Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden
And I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.
For I am humble and gentle in heart and you will find rest for your souls.”

As we come to the table of grace this morning... in the name of the F/S/HS