

The Year of The Disciple

Discussion Guide

Mark 1.14-20

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- o Do you view yourself as a follower or a leader? What about you makes you see yourself in this light?
- o Optional: What, if anything from the sermon, encouraged, challenged, or really made you think?

Setting the Stage: *Am I a follower or a leader? I suppose our answers would differ in keeping with our personality and life-circumstances. Can the answer differ when it comes to Jesus? Is it possible to relate to Jesus, to truly respond to his call and be anything other than a follower? What does it mean to be a follower anyway? How does following look today in a high-tech world full of competing demands? It really can't look like abandoning everything and following. Can it?*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Mark 1.14-20.
- What was the central message of Jesus? What was Jesus saying with this message? (*Consider reviewing the Textual Notes and Context and Background.*)
- What about Jesus' message was good news?
- How did people respond to Jesus' message? What does their response say about what they understood Jesus to be saying?
- Jesus came preaching the message that the Kingdom of God had come near. In response, people were called to reconsider what Kingdom was reigning in their life and to allow God's Kingdom to reign. What Kingdoms might exist in people's lives that could compete with God's Kingdom?
- James, John, Peter, and Andrew's response demonstrates the heart of true repentance and belief. They abandoned all other claims on their life to follow Jesus. Do you think this response would be easy or difficult for people today? Can you elaborate?
- What Kingdoms, if any, do you see in your own life that might compete with God's own?
- What, if anything, makes abandoning these Kingdoms to follow Jesus difficult? Can you elaborate?
- What might it take for you to respond by truly following Jesus?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group Prayer time
- o House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

Come, Follow Me

Mark 1.14-20

Context and Background

Gospel/Good News: The word “gospel” or “good news” is a word that originally was used to describe a royal announcement that benefited the populace. A herald would stand and proclaim a “gospel/good news” message that victory had been won in battle or that a new king had ascended the throne. In the Greek version of the Old Testament, this word was used to describe God’s action on behalf of His people. In the New Testament, we see something of a combination of these two uses. In the New Testament, the word “gospel” or “good news” is used to refer to the message of the action of God that benefits people. However, the authors of the New Testament, particularly Mark, add one additional element. They equate the content of the gospel/good news not with an announcement but with a person, the person of Jesus. To proclaim the good news is to proclaim the life of Jesus (Mark 1.1). Jesus and the life he lived is the good news, the announcement of God’s work that benefits people. It is important to remember this truth as one reads the New Testament and considers responding to its message. To respond to the gospel/good news is not to respond to a body of information or truths. In responding, one is responding to a person, the person of Jesus.

Repent: The word “repent” in modern English often carries with it ideas of remorse and contrition for one’s behavior. However, to bring these ideas into the New Testament use of the word leads one to misunderstand its meaning and import. In the ancient world, to “repent” meant that one simply changed their mind about something. It involved considering and then adopting a new way of thinking, perhaps even viewing the world. In the New Testament, the word stresses an inward act of turning rather than an outward act of turning. Thus, to repent meant to change one’s mind, to think in a new way. This in turn led to a new way of life. However, this new way of life began with how one thought about themselves, life, and the world. In the ministry of Jesus, one finds the call to repent (Mark 1.14-15). This call is therefore not a call to be remorseful nor is it a call to engage in external change. To repent is to change the way that one thinks, in this case by accepting Jesus’ teaching about the world and God’s Kingdom. In so doing, one finds that their inward turning leads to an outward turning in their lives.

Kingdom of God: The Kingdom of God is simply the realm of God’s effective rule. In the Old Testament, it was often equated with the land of Israel and seen as being consummated through physical kings appointed by God. However, after the exile, thinking on the Kingdom of God shifted. People began to understand that a physical king and land were not needed for God to reign. He could reign in the lives of people and through them bring His power to the places they lived. The Kingdom of God was central to the preaching of Jesus. Jesus proclaimed that God’s Kingdom had arrived (Mark 1.15). To say this implies that other Kingdoms already exist, Kingdoms that are in competition with God’s own Kingdom. The arrival of God’s Kingdom signals an ensuing conflict in which God’s Kingdom will seek to triumph over existing Kingdoms, both in the world and in the lives of people.

The Text

The Arrival of the Kingdom (Mark 1.14-15): These verses describe the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. This ministry began after John the Baptist was arrested by Herod Antipas (See Mark 6.14-29). At this time, Jesus went to the land of Galilee. This is an important shift in ministry focus from that of John. In John’s ministry, people had to journey to John from wherever they lived to the Jordan River. Now, rather than engaging in a ministry that asks people to come to it, Jesus engages in a ministry that goes to people. This ministry has one central message, the Kingdom of God. Mark is clear about the crux of Jesus’ message; the Kingdom of God had come near. This phrase indicates that God had broken into time and space for the purpose of establishing His effective rule, both in creation and in the lives of people. This movement signifies that other competing Kingdoms already have control over creation and people. God’s movement in light of the presence of competing Kingdoms calls for a response. Jesus urges people to repent and believe the good news (See *Repent* and *Gospel/Good News*). Jesus urges people first to begin thinking differently, to change their minds. This changing of one’s mind is about the Kingdom of God and the competing Kingdoms of the world. Jesus is calling on people to see the world in a new way, to see that God is the rightful ruler of the world and their lives. In considering this, Jesus then urges belief, an act of faith in which one accepts God’s effective rule and moves to reorient their life around it. However, as Mark has stated, the good news around which people are called to orient their lives is not a body of truth but a person, the person of Jesus (Mark 1.1).

The Power of Jesus’ Call (Mark 1.16-20): Having described Jesus’ central message, Mark moves to highlight what responses to this message looked like by telling how four men responded. The responses of these four men are important for they provide an example of what true repentance and belief to the good news look like. As Jesus was moving about and preaching (implied), he encountered a group of fishermen. The first two men, Simon and Andrew were casting their nets into the lake. The casting of nets from the shore may indicate something of a small, low-scale fishing operation. Jesus urged the brothers to follow after him. In so doing, they would become fishers of people. The call to follow Jesus is nothing short of a call to follow after Jesus as a rabbi. Rabbis in this time chose their followers/disciples. The point of following a rabbi was to learn from him in both his teaching and way of life so that the disciple might become and live just like the rabbi. Jesus’ choice of “students” is shocking, fishermen. Further, he seeks his students, rather than his students seeking him. Jesus’ actions display both an intentionality and an urgency. Hearing the call to follow after Jesus for the purpose of becoming like him, both Peter and Andrew respond by leaving their nets and following. The response is the same with the next group of men, James and John. Unlike Peter and Andrew, James and John seem to be part of a larger, more up-scale fishing operation as they have boats. He issues the same call to James and John that he issued to Peter and Andrew. They make the same response. They leave their present way of life and follow. What is important to grasp is the compelling authority of Jesus’ call. So compelling is the call of Jesus that all prior claims on these men lose their validity. Nothing is more important than orienting their lives around Jesus for the purpose of becoming like him. This, in living-color, is what it means to repent and believe in the gospel. It is to reconsider the claims (competing Kingdoms) on one’s life for the claim of God’s Kingdom. In reconsidering these claims, one then abandons all other Kingdoms for the purpose of orienting their life around God’s effective rule for the purpose of becoming like the person of Jesus.

Application: The call of Jesus is a compelling call to think differently, to think differently about who and what controls our lives. Does God, who has the rightful claim on our lives, really control our lives? If not, will we respond by orienting our lives around Jesus for the purpose of becoming like him so that God might reign in our lives?