

## “Seek the Truth”

### Mark 1:14-20

The Gospel of Mark has been in the news more than usual in recent days. You may have read about the claim of papyrus fragments of the Gospel of Mark dating from the first Century (or maybe that wasn't a news item that grabbed your attention). This would be the oldest known copy of any of the gospels. They were actually found a few years ago, but the world of archaeology moves really slow. The jury is still out on whether these fragments are authentic, but whether they are or not, it doesn't change the place that Mark has as an historical record of the life of Christ.

Mark wrote his Gospel between 50 and 60 AD as he was working in close proximity to Peter. This is essentially Peter's Gospel. Matthew's Gospel has already been written and circulated among the churches. I know that there are many who say Mark was written first, but that suggestion was pushed by critics of the Bible in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries who made all sorts of ridiculous claims (without any factual evidence) that the Gospels were made up by the church in later years (2<sup>nd</sup> Century or even 3<sup>rd</sup> Century) to justify the Christian religion. It is unfortunate that not everyone who talks about the Bible or God is helpful in forming your faith. Seek the truth.

The reality is that the Gospel of Mark is written with the understanding that people are already familiar with the goings-on of the life of Christ. And we see that in our text today. Mark begins his Gospel with John the Baptist. Jesus is baptized. He then goes out into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by Satan. All this takes place in the first 13 verses. He gives a really quick overview, as if he is writing to people who already know the story.

Then, we hear that John is arrested. Arrested? By whom was he arrested? Mark doesn't bother to tell you. If you have never heard the Gospel and you start by reading Mark, there seems to be some unanswered questions. And you need to know the rest of the story to get the full effect of what Mark is telling you about Jesus.

John is arrested. What was John doing? He was preaching "Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand. In fact, it is already here (in the person of the Messiah/the Christ)." John gets arrested, by whom? Herod Antipas who has authority over the region of Galilee. And Mark writes this with the assumption that you know all this and that John was killed by Herod and his wife, because John had spoken out against their unholy union.

So after John gets arrested, what does Jesus do? Jesus went to Galilee. What does He do there? He is preaching "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel." This sounds a lot like the message of John the Baptist. He went

where? Galilee. But isn't that where John was just arrested for preaching the same thing? Yes.

Doesn't John get killed for preaching this message? Yes. What is going to happen to Jesus on account of the Gospel? What is the Gospel? Is there any Gospel without the death of Jesus? (And of course, the resurrection.) Jesus conquers death.

Mark's Gospel makes perfect sense as long as you know the rest of the story – as long as you know the context. None of this story makes any sense unless Jesus dies on the cross – and rises from the grave.

Mark assumes you know the context of the events in Jesus' life. And this is especially true in regard to the calling of the disciples. Passing along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus sees Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. And Jesus says, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

Then He saw James and his brother John, and immediately He called them and they left their boats and their father and followed Him.

If you didn't know the context, it would seem that Jesus has the power of the Pied Piper of Hamelin and the disciples followed Him as if they were in a mystical trance. But do you remember what we talked about last week? By this point, Jesus has already spent a day with Andrew, who tells his brother Simon Peter, "We have found the Messiah."

Mark doesn't tell us any details, because it is assumed that you know this. Mark assumes that you know that prior to Jesus saying "Follow Me" to Peter, Andrew, James, or John, Jesus had gotten into Peter's boat, preached to the people, and had told Peter to put out his net onto the right side of the boat – and there was a miraculous catch of fish.

Mark writes his Gospel assuming that you know the context. And He should assume you know these things? He is writing this about 20 years after Jesus death and resurrection. All the Roman world is talking about Jesus of Nazareth and the empty grave. It is THE topic of conversation – even among the pagans.

For example, compare Jesus to Julius Caesar. In the 150 years after Julius Caesar died, consider his military exploits (he conquered Gaul, fought against my barbarian ancestors in Germany, declared civil war on Rome, defeated Pompey (his rival for the throne), and crowned himself the first Emperor). Yet, more non-Christian writers mention Jesus within 150 years of His death than mentioned Julius Caesar's military campaigns. That is not even taking into account the Christians who are writing about Jesus of Nazareth. Julius Caesar conquered the Mediterranean world. Jesus conquered death.

In Mark's day, all the world was talking about Jesus of Nazareth. All the world is still talking about Jesus of Nazareth. Seek the truth. Amen.