

“Gospel Renewal & The Story Of The Universe”

Mark 1:14-15

~ Delivered at Central Baptist on September 18, 2016

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to Mark 1.
- This fall we are talking through our new proposed vision and its accompanying 3-year plan. Next week we will start talking about the plan side of it - about *what* we want to do and *how* we want to do it.
 - But I want to spend another week on the vision itself, which is “renewing our community through the gospel.” The vision answers the more fundamental question of *why* we are making any plans at all.
 - Knowing why you are doing something makes all the difference.
- Imagine walking up to a group of stonemasons building a wall. You ask them if they like their job. The group says, ***“It’s a tough job. We work in the scorching sun. The hours are long and we’ve been working on this project forever. But hey, it’s our job to lay bricks and it pays the bills.”***
 - You then walk fifty feet down the wall that is being built and you ask a second group of stonemasons if they like their job. Their answer starts out the same: ***“It’s a tough job. We work in the scorching sun. The hours are long and we’ve been working on this project forever.”*** But then they smile and say, ***“But it’s all worth it because, together, we are building a cathedral.”***
 - The obvious difference between these two groups is that the second group possesses a sense of purpose. They can see *why* they do what they do. They see that they are part of a cause that is bigger than themselves. This inspires them and makes all the difficulties feel worthwhile. On other hand, the first group has no sense of being part of a cause. So they lack camaraderie, lack joy, and would probably quit in a second if they found an easier job.
- To see our community renewed through the gospel is a cause to be part of. Today I want to show you that this is not just simply a minor theme in the Bible. Rather it is one of the biggest themes in the Bible. It is the cause that God is all about and the cause he calls us into.
 - Our passage today captures this perfectly. Mark is introducing us to Jesus – to who he is and what he is all about. In Mark 1 Jesus launches his public ministry. Verses 14-15 are so critical because they are the first time that Jesus speaks. Whenever someone wants to start a movement they make sure that their first public presentation captures what they are all about. Politicians do this. Trump says he is all about making America great again. Revolutionaries do this with phrases like “power to the people.”
 - In verses 14-15 Jesus announces what he and his cause are all about. Then immediately following this we see Jesus calling Simon, Andrew, James, and John to follow him - to join his cause. And Jesus calls each of us by name saying, “Follow me.”
- So let’s take some time to look at the cause that Jesus calls us to. Let me show you three things about it.
 - First, that it’s different than you think. Second, that it’s bigger than you think. And finally, that it’s more personal than you think.

IT’S DIFFERENT THAN YOU THINK

- The first thing that we learn about the cause that Jesus calls us into is that **(SHOW SLIDE)** it’s different than you think.
 - Most people think of Jesus as a great teacher, who like Buddha, offered some teachings and advice on how to live a better life. And so many just reject it because they see the rules as too narrow or they just say, “I’m not the religious type.” But I want you to see that all of this is a complete misunderstanding of what Jesus is all about.

- Look at verse 14 and notice what Jesus says he is all about. **READ 14 – Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.** This word “gospel” means “good news.” And then in verse 15 he says to **“Repent and believe in the gospel.”**
- We see right away then that **(SHOW SLIDE)** Christianity is about good news, not good advice. If you miss this you miss everything.
 - It is not that Christianity does not offer good advice. It does. But all the advice flows out of the good news. Let me explain the difference.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Good advice says what you must do in order to improve your present and future life. It is good advice when your doctor tells you to eat a balanced diet and cut out the junk food.
 - Good news is very different. **(SHOW SLIDE)** Good news is an announcement that something wonderful has happened and, as a result, the present and future are transformed.
 - Do you see the difference? Good advice is something *you* must do to improve your life. You can take it or leave it. Good news, however, is something that has already been done that changes your life forever.
- There is some news that is so good, so life changing, so history altering, that people cannot help but burst forth in joyous response.
 - When WWII ended the good news spread like wildfire. Photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt was in Times Square taking photos of the celebration when he saw a sailor who was so overjoyed that he was just kissing every woman he came across – old and young. Today that would be sexual harassment. But apparently people were so filled with joy that no one objected. When the sailor kissed a nurse named Edith Shain, Eisenstaedt caught one of the most iconic pictures of all time. **(SHOW SLIDE)** It was published in *Life Magazine* under the news caption “Victory.”
 - Jesus says that he and his cause are fundamentally about good news – news that is so life changing, so history altering, that when a person understands it hears it, and believes it, they cannot help but respond with joy.
- This is so different from what most people perceive Christianity to be. Most people talk about Christianity as if it is a set of rules and rituals that ruin human freedom and fun.
 - But Jesus is saying, **“My cause is different than you think. You have not really understood what I and my cause are all about unless you feel that it is the most wonderful, thrilling, and exciting news you have ever heard in all of your life.”**
- Now, I have not yet given the specifics of what the good news is but even with what we have said so far you can discern if you really understand Christianity.
 - You know you have understood it when you find yourself sitting back in awestruck wonder over what God has done, or weep with joy, or just giggle to yourself and saying, **“I can’t believe it. Is this for real?”**
 - Is this how you understand it and experience it? It’s different than you think.

IT’S BIGGER THAN YOU THINK

- In the second place Jesus and his cause are **(SHOW SLIDE)** bigger than you think.
 - We have said that Jesus is all about good news. Now we have to answer what this good news is all about. Again, please look with me at verse 15. Jesus says this good news has everything to do with **“the kingdom of God arriving on earth”**
 - Now that phrase should strike you as world changing, life altering, joyously good news. It probably doesn’t and that is because we don’t know the backstory that makes this announcement of the kingdom such good news.
- It would be like arriving in a far off country and reading a newspaper headline that declared in giant letters, **“It’s over!”** And then you see people hugging everywhere with tears streaming down their faces saying, **“It’s over, it’s over.”** You would be very confused. What’s over? You need to know the backstory to know why this is announcement is such good news.

- Jesus' proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God assumes you know the backstory but since many of us do not, let's go through this.
 - Let's retell the story from the beginning so that Jesus' announcement hits us like it should.
- The kingdom of God refers to the reign of God as king. Theologian Graeme Goldsworthy defines the kingdom of God as **(SHOW SLIDE) "God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing."**¹ Genesis 1-2 tells us that in the beginning God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a garden. God is the King. Adam and Eve are God's people. They live in God's place, which is the Garden of Eden. They live under God's good rule and blessing.
 - In this kingdom everything is the way it was meant to be. The Old Testament word is 'shalom.' Shalom means peace. When we think of peace we usually mean the absence of war. But shalom is far more than the absence of war. Shalom is complete wholeness and well-being.
 - For one shining moment there really was a Camelot – a kingdom where all was as it was supposed to be under the rule of a good king.
- But the story takes a dramatic turn in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve believe the lie that living under God's rule is holding them back from true happiness. They rebel against God believing they can be happier if they rule themselves.
 - In that moment of rebellion Adam and Eve broke the world. Shalom was shattered. Their relationship with God was broken. They were cast out of God's presence and fell under judgement for their sinful rebellion. Their relationship with each other was broken and they became self-centred. And their relationship with the natural environment was broken. The earth was cursed and would no longer work like it was supposed to.
 - But you don't have to read the Bible to know that we don't do a very good job of ruling ourselves. When every person tries to act like a little king or queen it results in wars – wars in families, wars between spouses, wars with colleagues, and wars between nations. Christianity says that at the root of all our problems is the fact that we have turned away from our one true King and tried to rule ourselves.
- Despite Adam and Eve's rebellion, God did not strike them down and reject humanity. Rather, in his grace God made astounding promises throughout the Old Testament that he would renew his ruined and broken world and bring people back to himself. This great renewal project would involve not just people but the entire universe for in Isaiah 65 God says, **"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth."**
 - In short, God is promising to renew all things. The rest of the Bible is the story of this one single drama. It is the story of God's kingdom invading enemy occupied territory. It is the story of God reclaiming what was originally His.
 - So the Jews were longing for the future day when God would send His king to the earth. They longed for the day when God's king would step into history, take power, destroy evil, and set up his kingdom of shalom on the earth.
- You can imagine the hype that was generated in Israel when John the Baptist came on the scene and said, **"Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near."**² In other words, **"It's almost time. The long-awaited day is almost here."**
 - And then something crazy and unexpected happens. A man named Jesus comes out of obscurity and here in Mark 1:15 makes this pronouncement in our passage today: **"the time is fulfilled."**
 - The Greek language has two words for "time." The first is **"chronos"** which is just time ticking along one second after another. But not all time is equally significant. So Greek has another word for time, which is **"kairos."** Kairos is a moment in time that has great significance. Let me put it this way: a pregnant woman goes through nine months of

¹ Cited in Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture – Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*, 21.

² Matthew 3:2

chronos – time passes and she grows. But then one day she feels a deep pain and she says, ***“It’s time!”*** This is kairos. Kairos is a decisive moment within time that has tremendous significance.

- And Jesus says, ***“the kairos is fulfilled.”*** After thousands of years of promises Jesus says, ***“It’s time!”*** or ***“Time’s up!”*** Jesus says that with his coming God’s kingdom has arrived. God’s king who will make all things right has arrived.
 - Everywhere Jesus went he was about destroying evil and restoring shalom. You see it when he heals the sick and casts out demons. You see it in his teachings – his kingdom is contrary to our ways for he says to love your enemies, to pursue peace, to serve others, to be humble.
 - This king also came to destroy his enemies of sin, Satan, and death. He did this through his death and resurrection. At the cross he took our sin upon himself. He took the judgement that we deserve that all who believe in him might not have to face judgement. Through his death Jesus made it possible for rebels like you and I to be restored back to God. In his resurrection he conquered death, which is the great destroyer of shalom.
- Jesus stated that his kingdom will come in two stages. At his first coming he broke the back of sin, Satan, and death. He then declared that he will come a second time to utterly vanquish them.
 - The book of Revelation describes a fully restored kingdom of shalom. God’s people, who are everyone who trust in Jesus to rescue them, will gather in God’s place which is a new heavens and new earth, and they will live under God’s loving rule and blessing forever.
 - Revelation 21 puts it like this: ***“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”***
- Do you see why this announcement of the kingdom is such good news then? We all long and yearn for the world to be put right. Jesus announces that with his coming heaven has invaded earth and one day his kingdom of shalom will fill the earth.
 - One of my favourite descriptions of this comes from the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky in his book *The Brothers Karamazov*. He writes, **(SHOW SLIDE)** ***“I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage...that in the world’s finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they’ve shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened.”***
- My other favourite way of stating this is to quote the end of the *Lord of the Rings* film. Like when Jesus died and all seemed lost, all seems lost as Gandalf the great leader has died. Sam Gamgee is in mourning until Gandalf suddenly appears in front of them. He is fully alive. Sam cries, ***“I thought you were dead!”*** Then he asks, ***“Is everything sad going to come untrue?”***
 - And the good news of Christianity is, “yes.” This triumphant “yes” is based on the fact that in Jesus, God’s kingdom has invaded the earth. That king Jesus has conquered sin, death, and evil at the cross and in his resurrection. The gospel then is nothing less than a cosmic renewal project.
 - God will not allow even one corner of his universe to remain scarred by sin but will bring total renewal to all things. He will not allow Satan even one small victory but will plunder his kingdom down the last brick and rebuild his universe into a glorious home for his people and for His praise.
 - All that has been broken will be fixed. All that has been lost will be found. All that has been devastated will be restored. This is good news. This is gospel. I told you Jesus’ cause is bigger than you think.

IT'S MORE PERSONAL THAN YOU THINK

- But now finally I want you to see that Jesus and his cause are **(SHOW SLIDE)** more personal than you think.
 - If you are tracking all of this you can see that this declaration of the kingdom of God invading this world in Jesus demands a personal response from us. For we are rebels against our Creator. Even though the castles of our own hearts are filled with darkness and pain, we keep thinking we can rule ourselves. And now the declaration comes from God that his kingdom of shalom is invading this world in Jesus.
 - So king Jesus is encamped outside the gate of your heart. And what a gracious king. He has not come to destroy you. He has come with good news. He is offering you a complete pardon for your sins. But it is not simply a pardon. Far more than that he is will bring you into his Father's house, make you an heir with him, and give you a place in his Father's kingdom that will last for eternity. Oh what good news to rebels like you and I. What a gracious offer. What good news.
- And here are the terms. They are very simple. Look at them in verse 15. **READ 15** - ***“repent and believe the gospel.”*** That makes sense. To repent is turn away from trying to rule your own life and to kneel before king Jesus, to take the crown off your head, to surrender to him, and say, ***“Forgive my Lord. Have mercy on me. Command me as you will.”*** To believe is to trust that Jesus really is the king and to believe this good news of the kingdom of God.
 - To all those who do this Jesus says, ***“Rise to your feet. You are forgiven. You are part of my kingdom. You are a son or daughter of the king. You are now part of my cause – the cause of renewing all thing through this good news.”***
 - You see Jesus wants to renew everything about you. Renew your relationship with God and then renew all the broken parts of your heart.
- C.S. Lewis illustrates this so well in his story called *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. We meet a boy named Eustace. He is extremely self-centred and mean until he meets Aslan, the great Lion who created the world of Narnia.
 - At one point Eustace finds a dragon's cave filled with treasure. With greedy and selfish thoughts on his mind he falls asleep on the treasure. When he wakes up he discovers, to his horror, that he has been transformed into a dragon. As Lewis writes, ***“Sleeping on a dragon's hoard, with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself.”***³
 - The dragon he has become is just an outward expression of who he is inside. This forces him to face the truth about himself and he does not like what he sees. He weeps over who he is but he cannot change himself.
- Aslan comes to him and leads him to a pool of water. Eustace wants to feel the refreshing waters but Aslan tells him to take off his dragon scales. He tries scratching his scales off but underneath he finds another set of scales and then another. Aslan says, ***“You will have to let me undress you.”***
 - ***“I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but was pretty desperate now So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it. The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt...Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off...Then he caught hold of me...and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious...I found that all the pain had gone...And then I saw why. I'd turned into a boy again.”***⁴
 - Eustace goes back and apologizes to his friends and cousins. Lewis goes on to say that ***“It would be nice, and fairly true, to say that, ‘from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.’ To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses.***

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 97.

⁴ Ibid. 116-117.

There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of these I shall not notice. The cure had begun.”⁵

- This is it. This is our proposed vision. All of us have dragonish natures. The good news is that Jesus came to renew us. When we come before him in repentance and belief he makes us into new creatures. He then works daily to cure us of that old dragonish nature.
 - So you see this is our proposed vision. We want to just get on board with what God is already doing in Christ. We want the gospel to renew us.
 - As Christ does this in us the renewal spreads to others.
 - As we experience the forgiveness of Christ we learn to forgive others thereby renewing broken relationships.
 - As husbands encounter the deep love that Jesus has for his bride they learn how to love their wives thereby renewing their marriages.
 - As the wealthy see how Christ became for our sakes that we might become rich, we begin to do acts of justice and mercy thereby bringing renewal to the lives of the poor.
 - As the gospel confronts our character we begin to act with integrity and honest thereby bringing renewal to our workplaces.
 - Is this not good news? Is this not a cause worth being part of? This is why we say that we want Central to be all about renewing our community through the gospel.

PRAYER OF RESPONSE

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Christ Jesus, I acknowledge you as King of the universe.
I ask for your forgiveness for all my sins trusting that you are a gracious King who will forgive me through your blood shed on the cross.
Renew every part of me so that I become more like you.
I gladly surrender all that I am and I all that I have to your cause and long for the day when my eyes will behold you in all of your glory.
Your kingdom come on the earth as it is already come in heaven. Amen.

⁵ Ibid. 119-120.