

# Following Jesus

*Mark 1:9–20*

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## The World Without Its King

When I was a child, around five or six years old, I saw the film *Robin Hood*. If you remember it, you will recall the shape of the story: the government is corrupt, taxation is crushing, the world is full of danger. People who try to do right get knocked down while those who cheat get ahead. The people are oppressed — and the reason everything is upside down is that a false king is on the throne.

At the very end of the film, Robin Hood rescues people enslaved and near death, and it is a remarkable moment. But things are not truly set right until the true king, Richard, shows up and dethrones the pretender. At that point, everything is put right. The kingdom is renewed.

That theme — of a world gone dark and wrong, oppressed and in the grip of evil, but delivered and rescued by the arrival of the true king — is a story that gets told over and over again. It spans ancient mythologies and modern cinema alike. Think about it: *Batman: The Dark Knight*, a city needing a hero it does not deserve. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* — the theme is right there in the title. *Star Wars*, with its evil empire and the young Jedi knight. Even *Shrek*. The list is endless, and it crosses every genre, every culture, every era. We see it in *Beowulf*, in the stories of Hercules, in the *Odyssey*.

It is the story of the human heart. We live in a world that is not right, and we long for things to be made new. And so, out of the human heart, these stories keep coming.

The reason I am here this morning — the reason I am speaking before you — is that there was an event in history where the story of the heart became *true*. The true King stepped into the world, and because of that, things are being made right. A new creation has begun. The real story has happened.

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## The Gospel

In the ancient Greek and Roman world, there was one word used to describe an immensely important and critical historical event. The word, in Greek, is *ε αγγελιον*. It means more than simply “good news.” It describes world-changing news of great significance.

When wars were fought and won — the enemy defeated, the prisoners released, freedom secured — that momentous event was called *ε αγγελιον*. When Caesar Augustus established the Pax Romana, the Roman Peace, across the western world, the edict that went out was called *ε αγγελιον*.

The first believers in Christ took hold of that word and said: there is one world-altering, life-changing, freedom-giving, prison-releasing, victorious, new-beginning event in all of history. It is the moment when the true King — Jesus — stepped into our world. And because of that, everything is being made right. That story of the heart is real, and it is real in the person of Christ.

That word, *ε αγγελιον*, is rendered in English as *gospel*.

The gospel is the world-changing historical event of the King stepping into our world and dethroning the powers and principalities of evil, of darkness, of chaos, and of death. I know that when we look out at this world, there is still a great deal of the old all around us — still brokenness, still sin, still vast amounts of human wreckage. But the good news, the *ε αγγελιον*, is that the King has come, and that there is now a righting — a righteousness — in our lives because of that event in history. People are now born again. There is renewal, reconciliation, new creation, because of the world-altering event of Jesus.

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## A New Creation

I am using the phrase *new creation* to describe the gospel — the event of Christ — because it fits precisely what we see at the opening of Mark’s Gospel.

Jesus, the Lord God Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, he who was and is and shall be, steps into our world. And the consequence is a renewal of creation.

The Bible begins with the old creation — the first three chapters of Genesis. We read that in the beginning was God, and that the Spirit of God hovered over the waters, over the chaos, over the darkness. In the King James Version, Genesis 1:2 reads:

“*And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.*”

That word *moved* — translated elsewhere as *hovered*, *swept*, or *brooding* — pictures the Spirit of God over those waters, and the waters themselves are a symbolic image of chaos and darkness. Then in verse three:

| “*And God said, Let there be...*”

Our Bibles begin with the triune God — Father, Son, and Spirit — at work together. God the Father. The Spirit who moves. The Word that is spoken. And as you walk through Genesis, you see this triune God creating: a garden, man and woman, the animals, the living world. Then in Genesis 3 we have what is often called the Fall. In the garden there is a tree, and there is a temptation with regard to that tree, and it ends in disobedience. All of creation becomes impacted by this disobedience of man — made in the image of God, but now separated from God. Death reigns. The false prince is on the throne.

Now, knowing that story, look at our Scripture this morning as the *ε ἀγγέλιον* — the historical, world-altering event of a new creation.

| “*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.’*” (Mark 1:9–11)

Here at the baptism of Christ, the triune God is fully present — Father, Son, and Spirit. Here are the waters again, with heaven torn open and the Spirit of God hovering above, and the Son immersing himself in the depths of this fallen world — in the chaos, the darkness, the death. God is doing something new.

And just as the first creation was soon followed by a temptation, we see it repeating now:

| “*At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert for forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.*” (Mark 1:12–13)

In the book of Romans, Paul speaks of how death entered our world through the disobedience of the first man, but now through Christ — the second Adam — we have life through his obedience. We see that being played out here in vivid contrast. Adam was in a garden: no threats, no dangers, life abundant — and yet he fell to the temptation of the tree. Jesus was in a desert: a wilderness, wild beasts, desolation — and yet he was obedient in the face of temptation.

And the temptation of Christ did not end in the wilderness. It extended all the way to the cross — his tree of temptation. Jesus prayed, “*Father, let this cup pass from me*” — he felt the

weight of it — but he was obedient to his tree, obedient unto death. And his death brought life to all. His obedience has brought life — new life, eternal life — to all who are in him.

This is the gospel. Jesus has come. The King has come. And the world, through his obedience, is being made right.

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## The Kingdom and the Call

We live today in what some call an *in-between time*. The work has begun and it shall be completed, but right now we can either live in the shadow of the old world or in the light of the new. We can either remain under the rule of the false prince — darkness, chaos, death — or we can live under the rule of the true King.

And so we read:

“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” (Mark 1:14–15)

Believe in this history-changing good news. What kingdom will you live in? Will you believe in the historical event of Jesus — of God stepping into this world? Will you define your life by the King and his kingdom? Will you follow Jesus?

I do not believe in universal salvation — not all are saved. But I do believe in a universal call. He does knock on the hearts of people. The question is whether we will follow him.

“As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.” (Mark 1:16–20)

What does it look like to follow Jesus? These verses show us three things.

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## What It Means to Follow Jesus

### First, Jesus must be the first priority in your life.

Notice what Simon and Andrew had to leave in order to follow Jesus: their occupation. Notice what James and John had to leave: their family. Now, we know from Scripture that Simon and Andrew still fished, and that James and John still spoke with and honored their family. We know that. But those things came *after* — they came *below* — their identity as disciples of Jesus. Following Jesus became the primary thing, the defining thing, in their lives.

Family and occupation still stand, for many people, as the most important things in life — more important, in practice, than following Jesus. I have even heard people teach that only the truly religious, only those in full-time Christian work, are called to put their faith before their jobs or their families. But listen to what Jesus says later in Mark:

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)

He does not say, *if you want to be really religious*. He does not say, *if you want to go into full-time Christian work*. He says *anyone*. Following Jesus — serving Jesus, knowing Jesus — must be the supreme passion, with all other things organized around that.

### Second, following Jesus has a purpose, and that purpose is the salvation of God worked out in people’s lives.

The purpose is not to make you happy. The purpose is not to make life easier. The purpose is not simply to make you a nicer person. The purpose of God is for the salvation of God to be worked out and manifested in the lives of people — including your own.

Look again at what Jesus is calling them to: *I will make you fishers of men*. Go back to that image of water and sea as symbols of chaos, darkness, and death. Jesus is saying, your purpose with me is to pull people out of death into life. He is inviting Peter, James, John, and Andrew to be a part of his ministry of new creation — to be instruments of bringing people out of darkness into light. That is what following Jesus is about. You are given your purpose in Scripture: to be a part of God’s work in the new creation of people’s lives.

### Third, following Jesus is about allowing God to work in you — and trusting him to do it.

Notice what Jesus says: *I will make you fishers of men*. There is an action being performed by Jesus *into* the lives of these disciples. He is not simply inviting you to be the same as you are. He is crafting you in accordance with his purpose. And notice — it does not happen immediately or all at once. Over the course of these disciples’ lives, following Jesus was a journey. In every hardship and sorrow, in every joy and blessing, God was at work, crafting them for himself and for his purposes.

Do you believe that? Will you accept it?

The disciples had no idea how hard this would be. But they followed anyway.

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### **Closing: A Covenant Worth Keeping**

Will you allow God into your life? Will you trust him with your life?

There is an old covenant that some have made with God — a simple, weighty set of commitments:

Will you obey everything the Lord commands, whether you like it or not?

Will you give thanks for everything he sends your way, whether you like it or not?

Jesus says to follow him. To obey him. To put him first. To keep praying. To not turn back. And when hardship strikes, to go through it with thanksgiving. That is how we become — how we are *made into* — fishers of men.

The King has come. The kingdom is at hand. And he is still saying to each of us what he said to Simon and Andrew on the shore of that Galilean sea:

*Come, follow me.*