



This week at Magdalen Road church we started a new series in the gospel of Mark. We began by thinking about what it is, that really make someone a Christian and that is NOT primarily about religious practices, moral choices or philosophical ideas but really and fundamentally it is our devotion to Jesus; it's his people following him.

We see that in the climax of this first passage as Mark wants us to see the right response to Jesus is that we follow him (v16 to 20).

Following him though is not a blind leap of faith in the dark but rather Mark gives us a number of reasons to follow Jesus, he shows that Jesus is the unique answer to the problems of the world. From the passage we considered two reasons why we should be a church that follows Jesus and then two aspects of how we actually follow him.

Two reasons why we should follow Jesus...

1. He can uniquely sort our problem

We're all painfully aware of the fruit of walking out on God. Turn our backs on the God of life and in comes death, turn our backs on the God who brings joy and in comes misery, turn our backs on the God who rules through his loving word and in comes confusion and discord. And yet these are all symptoms of a greater disease which is why from the outset both John the Baptist and Jesus speak of the need for repentance (v4 and v15). Jesus is more than just a papering over the cracks or a lick of paint - His message is that we we need to completely rebuild the house.

For Gods people then they were still in spiritual exile, yes in the land that God promised but they were ruled over by the Romans and it's striking that the glory of God had not returned with them from exile. They were a people but not really their own people.

We noted as well that the call for repentance is not simply the church judgementally wagging its finger at the worlds, but Mark begins his gospel with quotes from both Malachi and Isaiah and so we see Jesus comes to both judge and rescue. The context of the Malachi quote is God is going to come and judge his people (and so will see Jesus in all kinds of altercations with the Jewish religious bigwigs as the gospel unfolds). The context of Isaiah is God is going to come and rescue (and so will see God King bringing healing, exorcising demons and forgiving sins. Or

indeed three whole chapters as Mark unpacks the cross where we see Jesus dealing with the sin and rebellion of his people).

2. He has uniquely identified with us

Often when we look at Mark's Gospel we can end up seeing Jesus coming with power and authority (and that is correct) and yet that authority does not mean he sits at arm's-length but rather Mark is keen for us to note that Jesus closely identifies with his people. That's clear for example at his baptism where "he who had no sin took his place among those who had no righteousness and he was without sin submitted to a baptism for sinners". Jesus is not far off or distant or aloof from us but rather he identifies with us. Its there also when he heads into the wilderness-this is not a weird tangent but rather Mark wants us to recall (1) the people of God travelling through the wilderness for 40 years - and where they grumbled and got it wrong so Jesus gets it right also (2) We're also meant to recall Adam and Eve in the garden with the wild animals - and where they distrusted and doubted God so Jesus got it right. Here is the true son of God that we been waiting for here is one that comes close, loves us and identifies with us. Here is one who shows compassion and patience with his people. He is not distant.

Two ways in which we are to follow Jesus

1. He has a unique message

Jesus: speaking good news (v1, v14, v15). We remember that this is a verbal message with words involved and even though we want to show kindness and compassion and identify with people (see the example of Jesus above!) we also need to be brave in speaking and praying for opportunities and open doors. We also remember that this IS good news because the danger in our time is that we can be duped into thinking it's not good, as God is painted as a tyrant who wants to suck all the life out of life. Our challenge is to show that whatever the cost of following Jesus as the king it is still good news. Whatever we're called to give up or do differently, he is still worth it.

2. He demands a unique response

Jesus doesn't just announce these things but calls for a response - commitment to Jesus always goes together with a commitment to his mission. At once they left their nets and their father (v18 and 19). This is not a call for us to abandon our responsibilities but rather when we follow him we have totally new priorities. We don't just add Jesus in somewhere but we are called to put him first. Good calls us to follow him and yield everything to him - he asks for nothing less and he is worthy of nothing less. One thing that is so beautiful about Jesus as he knows us better than we do, and he is more committed to our joy and when we question whether we can trust him, know that he knows best as he calls us to follow him..

Here are some questions to start your group off...

- where are we in danger of defining ourselves by what we do rather than the one whom we follow?
- from the passage why is King Jesus worth following? Why does he call for repentance?
- what difference does it make that he identifies with humanity? How do we see him doing that?
- when are you tempted to think that the message of Jesus is not good news?
- how might the truths in this passage shape our use of the OS and us as a church?