

# **The First Gospel Sermon (According to Mark)**

## **(Mark 1:14-15)**

### **By Patrick Swayne**

Have you ever heard that the Gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ? I've not only heard it; I've said it. After all, Paul said, "I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand," and then identified what it was exactly that he had delivered: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1, 3-4).

Unfortunately, I've also heard people attempt to make the death, burial, and resurrection the Gospel to the exclusion of other aspects of New Testament teaching or simply fail to include aspects of the New Testament in the Gospel that they preach. It's important to view the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the central truths of the Gospel message – without these events, there would be nothing "good" about the "good news." However, it's equally important to view these truths as interconnected with other truths and that receiving and obeying the Gospel involves taking all of these truths on board. Mark's presentation of Jesus' first Gospel sermon can help us to see this.

After Jesus was tempted, Mark's account of His life mentions that John was put in prison. This "bad news" is contrasted with the fact that Jesus persisted in spite of John's persecution to preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14). Mark's record of His words is rather simple; Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (v. 15).

Before we connect Jesus' words with the premise for the article, let's unpack what Jesus was actually saying. What did He mean by, "The time is fulfilled"? A good cross reference for this would be Paul's words to the church at Galatia: "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). The Old Testament can be thought of as a period of waiting during which people looked for God to fulfill a series of promises and prophecies regarding His intention to save man from their sins. According to Paul, Jesus came at the fullness or the completion of that period of waiting. By saying, "The time is fulfilled," Jesus was alerting them to the fact that their waiting was over!

Part of God's plan for fulfilling His promises involved Jesus becoming what we all call Him: the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One, or in other words, the King. It's appropriate then that Jesus followed His declaration that the time was

fulfilled by saying, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” When something is at hand, it’s near – close enough to be touched. The kingdom of God wasn’t established by John or even merely by Jesus’ appearing. Instead, as Daniel prophesied, when Jesus ascended to the Father, “the Ancient of Days,” after His death, burial, and resurrection, He “was given dominion and glory and a kingdom” (Daniel 7:13-14). Jesus now reigns over His kingdom, the church which He built (Matthew 16:18-19).

Both the fulfillment of God’s promises and prophecies AND the coming of the Kingdom were a part of the Gospel, the “good news,” that Jesus was bringing. Jesus therefore encouraged people to “repent,” or to change their mind, and to take the first step towards Him by believing in that Gospel.

This might seem like a rather obvious thing to point out at this point, but I’ll do it anyway: Mark 1 comes before Mark 15-16. What I mean to say is that when Jesus encourages His audience to, “Repent, and believe in the Gospel,” His death, burial, and resurrection have not yet occurred. They would of course, and it would be just as important for Jesus’ audience to believe in those events and accept their consequences after they occurred as it is for us today. However, at that moment, accepting the Gospel meant that they needed to believe in Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s promises and accept the prospect of His coming kingdom. With the exception of the fact that Jesus’ kingdom has come, it’s the same for us today.

Preaching Jesus and the Gospel concerning Him has always meant more than simply preaching His death, burial, and resurrection. When “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them,” the Bible later reveals that he “preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” and that “men and women” responded by being baptized (Acts 8:5, 12). It’s important to understand the central nature of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection; without these events, our “faith is futile” and we “are still in [our] sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). However, it’s equally important that we see the Gospel as a body of teaching, all of which must be accepted if one wishes to be pleasing to God.