

## Mark 1:14-20 #2 in series: the Gospel of Mark

*14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" 16 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. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 At once they left their nets and followed him. 19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.*

It had a kind of gospel sound to it. The lyric that caught my ear was: "Take me to church..." This was as I flipped through radio stations on my way back from pastor's study in Cary (NC). What I had stumbled upon was not just some little-known tune played at the whim of a local radio host. This was on the *Ryan Seacrest American Top 5* for Tues. Jan. 13.

That one line – also the title of the song – might fool you. "Take Me to Church," as wonderful as the melody and vocals may sound, is terribly out of tune with God's truth. The singer quickly tells: sex is his "worship." He says: "I should've worshipped her sooner." And the refrain keeps coming back: "Take me to church – I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies..."

Let's pause to evaluate.

We hear a worldview so different from what God gives. The songwriter/singer preaches his sexuality, and the expression of it, is his religion – really, his life.

Actually, the straightforwardness of that does us a service of sorts. Do you hear the point that otherwise might remain unidentified? The choice people face in life isn't between: God or nothing. It is really: Who or what will be your God (or god, depending on how you answer)? You will worship something: there is always something most important in life, or that becomes the compelling influence in life. The bottom line is: What will it be?

Our verses today start out: "John was put in prison." Now Mark spends no time here in ch.1 telling why John the Baptizer was imprisoned. But if you dig a little, you will find a connection to the issue we're talking about. John's imprisonment had everything to do with people living out the fact: something was most important to them in life. That really shows up on both sides: inside and outside the prison bars. Let's look...

If you have your own Bible with you, you may want to make a note at 1:14 referencing Mark ch.6, vs.17-29. The assigned sections in Mark later in the year push us right over this part that gives the details surrounding John's imprisonment. It fits for us to take this up now. **Project on wall & read Mark 6:17-29**

*17 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John*

*and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. 21 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." 23 And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." 24 She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. 25 At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29 On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.*

Look at Herod. John preached the truth of God to him. And the response? Herod had him arrested. It might seem strange, but Herod also spent time listening to him. Herod was torn. But he didn't want to give up his sinful relationship with Herodias. That remained more important to him than God's truth. Still, he was convinced there was a connection between John and God. So he kept John alive. But even that in the end he recklessly abandoned. Why? A wild party led to a big boast, and saving face and impressing people were what Herod decided was most important to him.

Look at Herodias and her daughter. You might wonder: "you could have had anything up to half of all that Herod owned, and this is what you ask for?" But the motivation for the request is quite straightforward: "No one is going to take from me what is mine!" Herodias liked her position. She was going to safeguard the life of luxury she enjoyed. John – really God's truth – was a threat to everything she held dearest. She would do whatever she thought necessary, to make her self-interests more secure. Her daughter followed in step with her lead.

From Herod and Herodias deserting their spouses and shacking up, in order to sin together... To Herodias' daughter dancing for Herod and his guests [we're spared the sordid details of just how low the revelry had sunk at Herod's table] ... Lust, promiscuous lives, jealousy, anger, intrigue, trickery ... You'll find the same stuff lived out on reality TV or acted out in movies. You'll hear the same sordid stuff glamorized in lyrics of some of the billboard pop songs. And those are just microcosms of our culture in general. Yeah? Sadly, you see how "true to our day" this scene from the gospel of Mark is.

So this undoubtedly registers as relevant to today. But here's the thing: if we look out at our culture and merely stop at saying "look at what's being done out there," we easily become self-righteous. You get what I'm saying, right?

Make application to your individual, personal life.

We benefit from being aware of what is going on in our culture if... We then look at self and ask:

- When have I behaved no different really from the world in which I live – acting equally out of tune with God’s truth?
- How have I allowed the society around me to rub off and show up in the way I think, talk or behave? For example: Do I allow what people think of me to direct my actions, rather than being guided by God’s truth?
- Where do I feel the battle from my sinful flesh to keep doing what I want, in spite of the clarity with which God identifies the behavior as sinful?

We’ve each got answers to those questions.

Now let’s get back to Mark ch.1.

We’ve spent time fleshing out and talking through application from one small part of vs.14 from Mark ch.1. And you might wonder: how does this connect with the rest of what we’re looking at from ch.1?

The unifying thread to these verses is: the proclaiming of God’s truth. John the Baptizer called it out. The disciples would be trained to go out and share it. And at the center of everything is Jesus. Jesus went throughout Galilee calling out to the people with the good news of God. In fact, this is noted as the characteristic activity, his central activity as he traveled about.

What’s God’s news? “Repent and believe the good news.”

There was in Jesus’ day, just as today, differing reactions to God’s truth. By seeing the back-story to John’s imprisonment, we see firsthand how some individuals rejected God’s message. Their sin, life the way they wanted it, remained most important to them.

Now we see the contrast: there were those who repented of their sin and rejoiced at the good news.

That’s also true today. This is news that you and I rejoice to hear. The you and I who know there is so much wrong, not just in the world but from us. The you and I who hurt and who have hurt others. The you and I who know the good we ought to do (and want to do), but often fail to do.

Jesus did not come as coach, calling out to you and me instructions of how to get our behavior up to par to gain God’s acceptance and heaven. We’d be in trouble. We’d never be able to make it! Jesus came calling out: “Admit your sin. And trust in me as the only remedy.” He came as Savior! That’s the good news.

2,000 years ago, Jesus – God the Son – walked this earth. “The time had come.” God fulfilled his promise. The One to crush the devil’s head had come. The offspring of Eve – the descendant of Abraham – in the tribe of Judah – in the family of David. Immanuel – God with us. The one from among his people, yet eternal God!

John the Baptizer trusted: "This is the One greater than me (1:7) & this is the One who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). That means he takes away my sin." God the Holy Spirit brought John to believe this personally.

And we see evidence of the faith living in him. Everything else was less important than God and God's truth. So in spite of the painful imprisonment that came with it, he chose to hold fast to God - he would not compromise God's saving truth. And when his life ended there, God delivered him to the glorious freedom and rest in heaven.

Then we come to Peter, Andrew, James and John. The other three Gospel accounts fill in events leading up to this day recorded in Mark ch.1. The four of them had already been brought to know Jesus and to trust in him. Jesus was now calling the four of them to a full time role of being trained to proclaim the news of Jesus.

And the faith living in them shows. Keep in mind the context. Herod's treatment of God's other spokesman [John the Baptizer] would have been well known. But this did not discourage them. They would learn to tell others God's saving truth.

So what now? What about today?

I asked some of you in the survey I sent out this past week: what is the good news of the Bible? Those of you who had the chance to answer knew. The Holy Spirit has brought you to know and to trust:

The good news of the Bible is... Jesus died for our sins and we are saved!

The good news of the Bible is ...Our salvation through Jesus and a personal relationship with God through faith in him.

I also asked people at the food court of the mall the same question. In the time I was there I only got the opportunity to ask a handful of people. Among them several didn't know what the good news of the Bible is.

This section today from Mark isn't saying that everyone should take up a full time public ministry role. There is wider application for each of you. You express the faith living in you every time you hold fast to God and his truth. You express the faith living in you every opportunity you seize to tell others the good news of God which He has brought you to know.

May the Lord lead us, inspire us, and breathe strength into us to live out the reality: he and his saving truth are the answer to what is most important to us. Amen.