

Week 3: Proclaiming the Kingdom of God

Hook



Main Point: Jesus calls us to lay down our lives and follow Him as King.

A superfan is someone who devotes a significant amount of time and money in an interest, hobby, person or group. Superfans of Taylor Swift, known as “Swifties,” are famous for their devotion to the popstar. A 26-year-old, New York-based Swiftie reported spending nearly \$9,000 to attend 12 Taylor Swift concerts across America; this devoted fan has seen the musician in concert 43 times.¹ Swift’s superfans even plan their vacations around concerts; known as “Swiftonomics,” her concert destinations enjoy a healthy boost in tourism; during her United Kingdom tour, the cities she played saw, on average, a 337-percent increase in Airbnb searches.²

Q: Is there anyone or any group that you would follow around the country?

Q: What would motivate someone to sacrifice money and time to follow a musician?

Transition: Today we witness Jesus calling His first disciples. Called to much more than a musician, a group, or even a religion, these men were invited to give up everything they had to join the King of Kings as He began His earthly ministry.

Recap: In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark. In lesson 2, we looked at Jesus’ preparation for ministry and how every part of it pointed to His kingship as the Messiah the Jewish nation had been waiting for, but it was a different kind of kingdom than they expected, a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world.

In this lesson, Jesus will begin to proclaim this kingdom to the world.

Week 3: Proclaiming the Kingdom of God

Book

Main Point: Jesus calls us to lay down our lives and follow Him as King.

Mark 1:14–15 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus preached the coming of the true kingdom of God.

Q: How might Jesus' message about the kingdom of God have made Herod feel?

Q: How are the messages of repentance, faith and the kingdom of God all connected?

Mark tells us Jesus began His public ministry after John was arrested, but he doesn't tell us why John was arrested until chapter 6. This backstory may seem like a lot of political history, but it impacts who the people believed should be king and what they expected of the Messiah. At this point, Herod the Great, who ruled Judea when Jesus was born, was dead, and his sons ruled different parts of his kingdom. Herod Antipas, who ruled over Galilee, was the Herod who arrested John the Baptist because John said it was sinful for him to be married to Herodias, the ex-wife of his half-brother Herod Philip I³ (Mark 6:17–18). In Old Testament law, it was forbidden to marry your brother's wife (Leviticus 20:21) except in the case of Levirate marriage, when a man *had to* marry his brother's wife *if* his brother died without a son to care for her and carry on the deceased brother's name (Deuteronomy 25:5–10).⁴ But it is even more complicated than Herodias's marrying her brother-in-law; both Philip and Antipas were also her half-uncles.⁵ Herodias was the daughter of their half-brother Aristobulus IV, another son of Herod the Great by his second wife, Mariamne, who was one of the last heirs of the Hasmonean dynasty.

Who were the Hasmonean dynasty? In the Old Testament, God said only a son of David would rule in Israel. When Israel split into north and south after Solomon (~ 926 BC), a son of David ruled in Jerusalem (South/Judah)⁶ until the Jews were sent into exile in Babylon (586 BC). When they returned from the Exile (538 BC), Judah, as a territory under Persia, had a governor – not their own king. Persia was taken over by Greece in 333 BC. In 166 BC, the Jews revolted against the Greek emperor Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who persecuted them and desecrated the temple (the Maccabean Revolt, which Jews celebrate in Hannukah). The Maccabees (the Jewish family who led the revolt) established the Hasmonean dynasty and ruled Judah from 140 BC to 37 BC, when Judea was made a Roman client state and Mark Antony appointed Herod the Great, an Idumean,⁷ as ruler. Herod the Great married Mariamne, the last of the Hasmoneans, in

an attempt to legitimize his rule in the eyes of the Jews. But it wasn't a Hasmonean that God had said would rule; *it was a son of David*.

Eventually Herod felt threatened by Mariamne and had her and both their sons, Alexander and Aristobulus (Herodias's father), executed.⁸ This left Herodias an orphan, so Herod made her marry his next oldest son Philip (her half-uncle) to legitimize his claim to the throne.⁹ But Philip didn't want to be part of the drama and stayed in Rome, where he had been educated. When Herod died, his kingdom was split between his other three sons. Decades later, Herodias wanted to return to Judea where she felt she was the rightful heir to the throne, so she ditched Philip for Antipas.¹⁰ Having the power to choose divorce, usually only reserved for men, tells us a lot about Herodias's power and headstrong will.

This is the political chaos into which John the Baptist came preaching the coming of Messiah. Herodias and Herod Antipas were threatened by John's criticism, which wasn't just a moral issue; questioning the legality of their marriage could affect their claim to power in the eyes of the people. They were also threatened by his preaching that Messiah was coming, the true rightful heir to the throne, *a son of David*. Knowing this backstory helps us understand the danger Jesus put Himself in by not only preaching for people to return to God and be forgiven of their sins but that "the time is fulfilled" and "the kingdom of God is near."

This is why John had been arrested before Jesus even began preaching. The ministry of Jesus was so much bigger than human political games, but the rulers of the world saw Him as a threat to their power because the people still thought of Messiah in terms of a physical king over the physical nation of Israel. In His preaching, Jesus was reframing their understanding of the kingdom of God. It wasn't about who was on the physical throne in Judah in the first century, but God's reign over all creation. Jesus didn't come to restore independence to Israel. But He also didn't come just to reconcile individual people to God. That's why He preached the Gospel *of the kingdom*, not just repentance and faith. His redemption isn't just about individual salvation but also redeeming all of creation from the brokenness caused by sin (Romans 8:20–22). The end goal is His final kingdom, the new creation, where there is no more evil, suffering or pain (Revelation 21–22).

Q: What does Jesus tell people they must do in addition to believing? How do the two elements of his invitation relate?

Q: What difference does it make to your faith to know that the Gospel is not just about your individual salvation but about the coming of the kingdom of God?

Q: How can you share the Gospel of the kingdom of God with people today? What method of evangelism do you prefer?

Mark 1:16–20 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Discipleship is following Jesus. Faith is not just belief; it's action.

Q: What does the imagery of “fishing for people” tell us about what the disciples would do?

Mark's story is fast-paced action. After He announced the kingdom, Jesus went straight to calling His first disciples. He started with two pairs of brothers who were all fishermen – Simon (Peter), Andrew, James and John – three of whom became His inner circle of disciples. Mark's story of their calling is very short. Walking by the sea, Jesus saw Simon and Andrew and said, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men,” and *immediately* they left their nets and followed Him.” Then He called James and John, and they *immediately* left their father and followed Him. In Mark's story, we don't know if they had heard about Jesus before from the buzz around town or had heard Him speak or met Him before. John said Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist, had heard Jesus speak, and told Peter He was the Messiah (John 1:35–42), but we get none of those details here. This doesn't mean that Mark wasn't telling the truth, just that by the way he told the story, Mark conveyed the immediacy of their response to Jesus and completeness of how they left everything and followed Him.

Jesus called and they *immediately* left everything to follow Him. Whether they had heard about or met Him before didn't matter. When He called them to follow, they dropped everything and followed. They didn't hesitate. They didn't worry about how they would provide for themselves or how their families would survive when they were gone. They simply left. This was an act of complete and total faith. They had no idea what the future held, but they trusted that Jesus held their future and that was enough for them.

They left their fishing businesses behind, but Jesus told them they would become “fishers of men.” Luke added more detail, that Jesus gave Simon a miraculous catch of fish before He told him they would become fishers of men. Again, this doesn't mean that Mark's version isn't true, just that Mark streamlined the story to focus on the point he was making – instead of fishing for food, the disciples would “fish” for people. It was typical of Jesus to meet people where they were by using an illustration from their daily life or something right in front of them in the moment. If they had been farmers or

doctors or artisans, He likely would have used an illustration that fit those careers to say the same thing – your purpose in life is changing.

It's significant that Jesus called fishermen as His first disciples, not because they bring anything to the table but because they don't. Rabbis typically chose only the cream-of-the-crop students to be their disciples. All boys studied in the synagogue until age 13, when most began working in their family business.¹¹ A rabbi would select only a few to continue to study with him and take over his role. The men Jesus called were already working in their trade, so they had *not* been selected to continue studying to become rabbis. Later in Acts, the crowds were shocked that the disciples preached so well since they were uneducated, ordinary men, but it was because "they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13) and the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit that had come upon them at Pentecost (Acts 2).

That Jesus chose these ordinary, very flawed men shows us that following Jesus isn't reserved just for the cream of the crop. God can use anyone as ambassadors of His kingdom, because He gives us the words and skills by the power of His Holy Spirit. God doesn't *call the equipped*; He *equips the called*. But the way these ordinary guys dropped everything and followed shows us that discipleship isn't an ordinary life. Discipleship isn't just saying the sinner's prayer to get your "ticket into heaven" and going on with your life as before. It's picking up your "cross" and following Jesus (Mark 8:34). Offering your whole life as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1–2). This is repentance – turning away from your old life, doing a complete 180, and following Jesus. Faith isn't just intellectual belief; it's an active, wholehearted lifestyle.

Q: What does Jesus expect us to give up when we follow Him? How can we learn from the disciples' responses to His calling?

Q: In what ways are you still holding onto things from your life before Jesus? What would it look like to truly offer all that you are as a living sacrifice to Him?

Q: In what ways has God been equipping you for ministry?

Mark 1:21–28 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Jesus has divine authority, both in His teaching and His miracles.

Q: What was different about Jesus' teaching from that of the scribes?

Q: How did His casting out demons shows His supernatural authority?

Mark's story barrels forward, moving at a rapid pace. In only 20 verses, Jesus has been announced by John the Baptist, anointed by God Himself as Messiah, tempted by Satan; He has begun preaching the kingdom of God and called His first disciples. Here He and His disciples went into Capernaum, and He started teaching in the synagogue *immediately*, on the very next Sabbath. Then *immediately* after He taught, He cast a demon out of a man in the synagogue. These are the fifth and sixth occurrences of *immediately* in just these first 23 verses.

It was common for a traveling rabbi to teach in the synagogue; the people of Capernaum would have welcomed Jesus' preaching. In the Sabbath service, the preacher would stand to read a passage from the *Torah*, then sit down in the "chair of Moses" to expound upon the reading. Any scribe or teacher who sat in this chair was considered to be speaking with authority, just as Moses did when he judged the people (Exodus 18:13). But when the people of Capernaum heard Jesus speak, they heard a whole different kind of authority, an authority that came from His very nature, not a special seat or role in the synagogue.

Then He immediately cast out a demon, which showed His authority over the supernatural realm. The evil spirit knew who He was – the Holy One of God – and said so. The spirit assumed Jesus came to destroy them, which lets us know that 1) Jesus is sovereign over all things and 2) His ultimate mission is to destroy evil. This focus on Jesus' authority is in keeping with His preaching of the Gospel of the kingdom of God. Jesus is not only the king of Israel, but He is also King of Kings over all things, natural and supernatural. His final kingdom will be the perfect new creation in which there is no evil.

From the beginning of his Gospel, Mark was establishing the authority of Jesus and a proper understanding of the Gospel of the kingdom of God. Because a Gospel is not just a story; it's not just a biography; it's not just a history book. The purpose of Mark's Gospel is not just to give you information about Jesus. It's even more than just to get you to believe in Jesus. His goal is to get you to *follow* Jesus. To lay your life down to Him as king. Because Jesus isn't like anything else in this world or the supernatural world. He is the Holy One of God, who deserves our worship.

The people in this story responded with amazement at Jesus' teaching and His power. Mark wanted this to be our response, too. But just thinking Jesus is amazing is not enough. He wanted us to make the decision to follow Jesus as those first disciples did. And not to tarry about it, but to do it *immediately*, as they did. Mark's Gospel has a sense of urgency. Not just because Jesus may come back soon, but because every minute we don't choose to follow Jesus is a minute our life is missing the joy, peace and

love we could have if we did follow Jesus. If Jesus is really this amazing, we should not waste another minute. We should drop our nets and follow Him, too. And we should tell everyone we know, so His fame spreads everywhere as it did in this story.

Q: What area(s) of your life do you need to submit to His power and authority?

Q: Describe ways you have seen the power of Jesus in your life. How do you know from personal experience that Jesus is really who He says He is?

Q: Share your story of why you decided to follow Jesus. What circumstances, people or situation pushed you to make the decision?

Week 3: *Proclaiming the Kingdom of God*

Took

Main Point: Jesus calls us to lay down our lives and follow Him as King.

William Borden was the heir to the Borden dairy empire and was gifted a trip around the world by his parents. Instead of being caught up in the grandeur of the vacation, Borden felt a growing burden for the people as he traveled through Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The young man wrote to his parents and informed them that instead of being a businessman, he would be preparing for the mission field. Upon that decision he wrote two words in the back of his Bible:

“No reserves.”

Borden received several attractive offers for employment after he graduated from Yale in 1909; but he stayed the course with his eyes on the ministry. At that time, he added two more words to his Bible:

“No retreat.”

The prospective missionary graduated from Princeton Seminary and went to Egypt to study Arabic. During this time, Borden added his final two words:

“No regrets.”

Jesus has called you to give him your whole life. Will you live as Borden did – no reserves, no retreat, no regrets? Choose today to lay all your life on the altar for Jesus, being willing to leave everything else behind. He is worth it.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on what it means to really follow Jesus with your life. What does it look like to lay everything down before Him and follow Him with your life? What does it mean to make your life a living sacrifice? What kinds of things do you have to give up to do that? How should your life look different from the world around you? How should it look different from your life before Jesus? Be truly honest with yourself – what things about your life need to change for you to really follow Jesus as His disciple?

PRAY for your heart of discipleship to show itself in action. Ask for wisdom to know how to follow Jesus and the strength and resolve to do it. Pray for those in your life who do not know Jesus, that your life can be a beacon of light to show them the way and that you will have the right words to share the Gospel with them.

ACT: Worship Jesus as King. Take time right now to praise Jesus for how amazing He is. You can pray, sing, draw, write a poem, whatever you feel led to do; but tell Jesus just how amazing He is and why you choose to worship Him and follow Him as Lord of your life.

¹ https://www.foxnews.com/lifestyle/taylor-swift-superfan-spent-nearly-9k-attend-10-eras-tour-concerts-big-deal?utm_source=chatgpt.com

² <https://www.wvtm13.com/article/fans-following-taylor-swift-to-europe-eras-tour-tickets/60731610#:~:text=They%20saw%20a%20Europe%20concert,went%20on%20sale%20last%20summer.>

³ Herod Philip I is *not* Philip the Tetrarch (aka Herod Philip II), another son of Herod the Great, who ruled over the regions of Iturea and Trachonitis, northeast of Galilee (Luke 3:1).

⁴ The first-century historian Josephus confirmed in his history of the Jews that Herodias violated Jewish law – Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 94 AD. It also was very unusual for a woman to have the power to choose divorce; usually only the man could. This tells us a lot about the power of Herodias as a Hasmonean princess.

⁵ Though he was her half-uncle, Herodias and Herod Antipas were only five years apart in age.

⁶ This is why they were later called Jews instead of Israelites, because they came from Judah, the southern kingdom, as opposed to the northern kingdom who originally kept the name Israel but later became Samaria. The Samaritans in Jesus' day were descendants of the people the king of Assyria sent to Samaria to live there when he took the northern kingdom into exile in Assyria (2 Kings 17:23–24).

⁷ Herod was not Jewish by birth, but his family had converted to Judaism. Idumean was the Hellenistic (Greek) name for the Edomites, who are the descendants of Esau.

⁸ He also executed his oldest son Antipater (son of his first wife Doris) for treason because he had been plotting with Herod against his brothers, which raised a red flag for Herod.

⁹ This all happened when Herodias was only 8 years old; Herod betrothed her to Philip, who was 20. It would be several years until they were actually married, probably when she was 15. She left Philip for Antipas when she was in her early 40s, Philip was in his early 50s, and Antipas was mid-40s.

¹⁰ Matthew George Easton, *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, electronic version.

They could have also been in love, but there were certainly political reasons for them to marry.

¹¹ Jerusalem Talmud Keutbot 811 (ed. Heninrich W. Guggenheimer, 1999)