

*Where we start . . .*

We're in the midst of a presidential election cycle. With the intention of bringing "change," both candidates are drawing around themselves people of influence who can help them advance their respective agendas. What kinds of people are "change agents" likely to look for? Who would they seek to make part of the "inner circle" and why?

*What we read . . .*

In the introductory section of Mark, we see Jesus pictured as the divine "change agent;" He is here to personally usher in the breaking in of God's kingdom in a fresh and profound way. Let's see how He begins to go about that by reading Mark 1:14-20.

Having begun to announce His "agenda" (1:14-15), Jesus ends up travelling along the sea. Who does He meet?

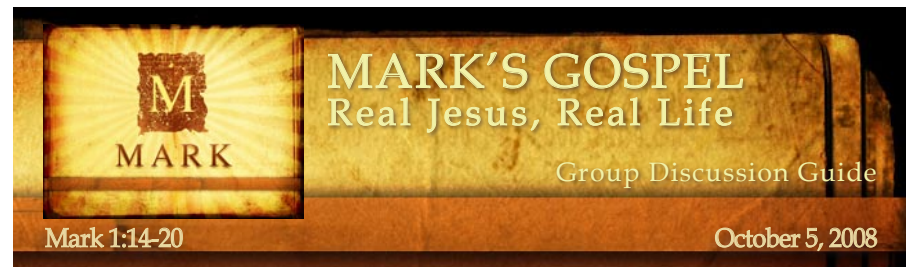
Where does Jesus meet them? What are they doing when they have this provocative encounter with Him?

How do you think Simon or James or Andrew or John would have initially understood Jesus' invitation to them?

What does Jesus' invitation to these four men suggest about how Jesus is thinking about what it means for the "kingdom of God [to be] at hand"?

*Why this matters . . .*

Jesus doesn't physically walk the streets of Greenville as He did the streets of Capernaum. Realizing that, what insight can we draw from His "call" to these four about our own journey with Jesus? How could what Mark reports shape the way you relate to Jesus?



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*Diving in . . .*

As we read and study a book like Mark, we have to be attentive to *how* we are reading. Foundational to reading Mark well is to read it as if it is telling us what really happened. That may seem obvious, but we do sometimes slip into reading the Gospels as if they are collections of “moral tales” or “stories with points” and forget that they are reports of something that actually occurred. That means we have to “get” what was going on in the moment recorded for us. (As we talk about Jesus’ “call” of the first four disciples, we will touch a bit on this.) But we also have to ask the “So what?” question. That is, once we know what the passage *says*, we have to wrestle with what difference it makes that we know or see or realize that. And we again have to be cautious not to make the passage say something that Mark, under the inspiration of the Spirit, didn’t intend. To do so runs the risk of *using* the passage to make our own point rather than listening and applying what the passage really does say. (As we seek to apply Mark 1:14-20, we will touch on this.)

*Discussing . . .*

What is surprising about Jesus’ inaugural actions as the one who is ushering in God’s kingdom is His choice of companions. As we’ll see in the reading, He chooses four common fisherman. The opening question helps set the stage for the somewhat startling nature of Jesus’ choice by encouraging some reflection on the current political scene. Presidential candidates, longing to “bring change,” tend to surround themselves with the best and the brightest—those they think can give them the best boost in the polls. Jesus is notably different.

As we read and discuss the text, encourage your people to read it “fresh.” The story may be familiar; the idea even more so. Jesus calls fishermen to become “fishers of men.” And, because of the familiarity, we think we know what the story is about.

But there are some very startling things about the account that should catch our attention (and, likely, *would* catch our attention if we didn’t start by thinking we already knew what the story was about!).

Don’t overlook where these men were when Jesus meets up with them. Pay attention to what they are doing. Mark notes these things for a reason. What do you see?

These are “ordinary guys.” Not necessarily the poor of the poor; but apparently not the well-to-do. Not necessarily religious types; but not necessarily God-less either. They weren’t scribes or priests or prophets. They weren’t in synagogue or on their way to Jerusalem for a feast or in the Temple offering sacrifices. In one sense, if Jesus is all about the breaking in of God’s kingdom, then for Him to begin that ministry in the common everyday world of the “average Joe,” when he is just going about his average day, is pretty intriguing.

These men seemingly weren’t on a search for the kingdom. They hadn’t given

themselves to a religious pilgrimage to find what was missing. Jesus came and found them. And that certainly tells us something about the way the kingdom of God is entering the world in and through the person of Jesus.

There are a couple of common misconceptions that you might want to be aware of in reading this passage. Not that your group will necessarily camp on either of these, but it would be good to be aware.

First, some read too much into these four men “leaving everything.” As the Gospel unfolds, it becomes clear that this initial “leaving” may not be nearly as extreme as it is sometimes presented. (“You have to turn your back on everything, leave all, in order to follow Jesus.”) Now, Jesus will explain (later in this Gospel) what it does mean to “leave everything” to follow Him, but apparently these four men did not cut all ties, burn all bridges, etc. Before the chapter is out, we will find the four of them, with Jesus, in Simon’s mother-in-law’s house; apparently he hadn’t severed all relationships. Also, later on in the journey, Peter still had a boat (and he ends up returning to his boat after the resurrection). So, just be careful in reading too extreme a view into this initial call. Simply put, Jesus invites these men to associate with Him, hang with Him. Yes, it will entail a change in priorities and focus and choices; but be wary of pitching it beyond that initial invitation to learn from Him.

The second thing to notice is the “fishers of men” language. Many Christians have come to see that as a reference to evangelism. To be a “fisher of men” is to “share the Gospel.” But that is probably *not* how these four men heard it. There are a number of times when that image of “fishing for men” appears in the Old Testament. It appears, for example, in Jeremiah 16:14-21 and Amos 3:12-4:13. In those contexts (and in others where the image is found) the idea is one of life-changing intervention in world affairs, the confrontation of sin, and even war and conflict. That is not to say that all of this is *intended* in Jesus’ use of the term, but only to caution us from reading too much of our acceptable Christian cliché thinking into the passage. To invite these four men to become fishers of men minimally must have meant—to them—that they were going to be part of God’s dramatic and life-altering invasion into the world. That’s a bit more than the “learn to share your faith” kind of thinking.

It should be encouraging to note that Jesus actually assumes responsibility for these men to *become fishers of men*. He says that if they come He will *make them become* what He wants for them. There again we see Jesus taking the initiative. He not only instigates the call that draws these men into the kingdom, but He also assumes the responsibility to bring about kingdom-related change in them.

When we start to think about what this means for us (in the *Why this matters . . .* section) we want to see what it shows us about Jesus. We want to explore what it tells us about Jesus’ priorities, Jesus’ approach, Jesus’ way of carrying out the “breaking in of the kingdom” agenda and then begin to think about what that means for us.

Should we conclude that Jesus will always/sometimes/often show up in our work? Perhaps not. But we should see that Jesus takes the initiative to draw us into what He is doing. Should we conclude that Jesus will extend to us the identical invitation He did to these four (and that He calls us with the same “fishers of men” image)? Perhaps not. But we should understand that Jesus’ kingdom initiative apparently involves establishing a community to participate in the kingdom. What Jesus did here is not a statement of what He will always do, but a picture of what He is like and the *kinds of things* He does in carrying out His kingdom agenda. And *seeing Him*, getting to know Him, is what we want in our reading of Mark.