

GREAT TEXTS--MARK 1:14-31

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on November 4, 1962 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

In the opening chapter of the gospel according to Mark the book begins with an account of the work of John the Baptist. Then, immediately it tells about Jesus coming down from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized of John. The next paragraph tells about the temptations which Christ underwent. All of this is told in thirteen short verses. Following this opening third of the chapter there are three additional paragraphs that I would like to read with you and from which I like to suggest the three-fold ministry of our Lord.

To Proclaim A Message

The first of these paragraphs is a very brief one including only verses fourteen and fifteen of Mark's first chapter. "Now after John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel." First of all, Jesus came into the world to proclaim a message. He did not come into the world merely to live a life, though that was certainly important. He came into the world to tell the world something that the world did not know, something that the world could not know until he revealed it. His was a message of truth. It was a message of salvation, and had he not brought it there would have been no salvation. Jesus preeminently brought a message of good news. We call it the gospel, the good news of Christ.

It was the thing most needed by man. Man's physical well-being is important. It is important for him to know how to raise better crops and to use land more efficiently. It is important for him to know how to carry on family and business affairs, but the message of Christ is the thing most needed by man. Think of all of the things that are discussed in the newspapers and on radio and television. There is nothing in this world as important as the story of Christ, the good news about how to become Christians and how to be saved. Sometimes I sit in a group where other emphases are prominent, where the conversation is on some secular subject, wholesome and fine in itself. Then I think, "These people among whom I am sitting and with whom I am talking, while they are efficient in this line, or expert in that field, do not really appreciate the most important thing in the world." I wish I knew how to make this the most important thing in the world in the lives of all the people I know. We have no deeper yearning in our hearts than that somehow this message that Christ came to proclaim might appear as important as it really is in the hearts of all the people of the earth.

Do you notice the urgency of this passage? Do you notice the immediacy of it? Our Lord does not say anything about the past, though certainly it would have been legitimate for him to trace the history that led up to this moment. He does not even say anything in this passage about the future, though the gospel of Christ points toward a wonderful future for Christians in the world to come. He does not mention the future here; he does not mention the past; he emphasizes the present. There is an urgency about it. Let me read again, "Jesus then came preaching the gospel of God and saying, The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent ye and believe in the gospel. These are imperatives; they emphasize the now. Oh, how I wish I knew the way to cause everyone to feel the urgency of accepting Christ, not sometime, but now, this very hour. There is no guarantee that there will be a tomorrow. Today is the day of salvation. Christ emphasizes the present tense.

To Call Individual Men

Then comes the second paragraph: "And passing along by the sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they left the nets, and followed him. And going on a little further, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the boat mending the nets. And straightway (again this word straightway emphasizes the urgency of it) he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him." (Mark 1:14-20).

In the second place, Jesus came into the world to call individual men. Jesus was a great leader. He did not come simply to stand off in a corner with the good news that he brought, nor to live his great life in seclusion, but rather to bring joy into the lives of people. There is a penetrating quality about Jesus. No one could ignore him. He was like salt. You cannot ignore salt in your food. If there is salt there, you know it immediately. Wherever Jesus went he was seen; his presence was felt. But the emphasis that I see in this is that Jesus called people. It was not just a great movement in the aggregate. Jesus called individual men to follow and work with him. As a result Simon and Andrew immediately left the boat with their father and followed him. Jesus went on just a little further down the Sea of Galilee shore line, and there he saw James and John, sons of Zebedee. He called them. They were mending their nets so they could go back to fish again. He said, "Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men." And they did it immediately. When Jesus calls people to come he wants them to come immediately.

Do you feel the personal element throughout God's book? The entire Bible is written in terms of persons. It was Joseph, or Abraham, or Daniel, or David in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, preeminently, it was Jesus. He was a person. He walked here; he went there; he said this; he did that. He was always a person. He was real. Quite consistently God's appeal is always in terms of persons. When the gospel was preached to the Gentiles it was through a person. It came through Paul the great apostle to the Gentiles. We do not have a description of how tall he was or how he looked, but you can almost see him as he walked into Athens, as he moved over to Corinth, as he was a prisoner and taken to Rome. He was a person. God sends persons to carry his gospel, just as he sent a person to bring the gospel into the world.

The other side of this coin is that God is interested in persons. We do not like to be just numbers. When I read that there are more than 180,000,000 Americans it makes me feel quite insignificant, but when I read the Bible and learn that God knows even the number of hairs on my head, I feel like I am somebody. When I read that I am made in the image of God, that I am a soul that will live on through eternity, I can hold my head upright. We are not mere numbers, or grains of sand on a vast seashore. God knows our names. He has for each individual certain plans. We are persons. One of the most wonderful things about Christ's coming was that it was personal. He called individuals.

Person to Person

There is a wonderfully practical point here. We do some preaching from the pulpit and we do some by radio and television, but the chief way that the gospel has always been spread is from person to person. Here is a man who believes in the Lord, and it spills over into the life of his child or the life of his companion. It spills over into the life of a neighbor or someone with whom he works. It is person to person.

Does this have any implications to those of us who are Christians? God's whole plan of spreading the gospel is for individual Christians to carry the good news of Christ in person. Christ selected men and then trained these men. The hope of our world is in taking young people and planting deeply in their hearts the principles of Christianity. Christian training is the greatest need of life. It needs to be done in the home. It needs to be done in the church. That is why we have a full program of Bible classes and it is why you need to be present on Sunday morning for Bible study. Wherever possible Christian training also needs to be given in the school. Our young people need to be trained. They have great potentials if they can learn the right facts and the right attitudes.

To Show Compassion

Finally, there is a third paragraph. "And they go into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes. And straightway there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit ..." Jesus then cast out the unclean spirit and restored the man to normalcy. Then we continue to read, "And straightway, when they were come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever; and straightway they tell him of her: and he came and took her by the hand, and raised her up; and the fever left her, and she ministered unto them." (Mark 1:21-31).

The third great purpose of Christ's coming was to show compassion to people who were in need. Here was a man who was possessed of an evil spirit. Christ cast it out and gave him his normalcy again. Here was a woman who was sick of a fever. Christ raised her up and she was well again. Wherever Christ went he healed people who were lame; people who were blind received their sight; people who were deaf received their hearing. Sometimes they were palsied or paralyzed and he gave them the ability to walk again. Jesus healed people; Jesus had compassion on people. It was by his compassion that he won their hearts. When you feed a hungry stomach then a man is disposed to listen as you tell him the good news of Christ. When you put clothes on backs that are cold you open doors in hearts to tell them the good news that will save their souls. One of the great principles demonstrated in Christ's life was, "If you want people to trust you, if you want people to accept your motives as pure and wholesome rather than designing and selfish, you do something for them." Help the sick, help the hungry, help the poor, help the distraught. Then their gratitude will overflow and they will listen when you tell them how their soul can be saved.

Here are three simple works and each one is not only Christ's work, but our work. Jesus came into the world to proclaim a message. He was a teacher, a preacher. Every one of us, in private or public, ought to be a preacher. In the second place, Jesus was a leader, and his wonderful ambitions and ideals and attitudes of faith and trust in God spilled over into the lives of those about him. We, too, are leaders, and we must be leaders for Christ. We too, must call people in the way that they will hear the call. Then, finally, Christ loved people and did for them what they needed. If there is sickness in a home we can supply comfort and food and care. If somebody is discouraged we can supply an encouraging word. Our Lord and three great purposes. Since we wear his name and since we are his, we have the same three great purposes--to proclaim his gospel, to call people, and to do good..

As we close this study we extend the Lord's invitation. What a wonderful privilege it is. Christ lived 1900 years ago but his influence and his invitation is just as alive today as it was then. Will you heed it? He is calling you to confess his name before men, to repent of your sins, to be buried with him in baptism, and than to live like he lived.