

Come and Follow Me
Mark 1:9-20

Friends, the birth of a child is an exciting event isn't it! When someone you know, maybe a friend or a family member announces they are expecting everyone is excited for them.

Congratulations are given, baby showers are held; maternal advice is dispensed, baby furniture is set up, and everyone counts down the months, the weeks, the days until the baby is due.

And when the child is born phone calls are made, emails and pictures are sent. Birth announcements get mailed out, more gifts are given, visits are made, and everyone ooohs and ahhs over the baby, and it's a momentous occasion.

And then the sleep deprivation starts! But seriously – Often times after the initial flurry of activity around the birth settles down, people tend to refocus on their own lives and the new baby isn't the main focus anymore.

And I'm a perfect example of that – when my nieces and nephews were born I called my sisters to congratulate them and I asked questions about the newborn, I got pictures and birth announcements in the mail, etc...

But once that was done...now, if you ask me anything beyond if they are a boy or a girl and what their names are and I don't know too much about them.

And I'm telling you this to illustrate what can happen to us with regards to Jesus birth. We're all excited that Christmas is coming, there's a great deal of excitement and anticipation building up to it, we have big services, family celebrations, vacations and presents and then it's sort of done... and we go back to our regular routines and lives.

And if you ask us how well we know the child whose birth we just celebrated we might not be able to tell you very much about him other than to say things like: He was God's son. He's our savior. He was a good teacher. He ended up dying on the cross.

All good and true things, but just because I can tell you the name and gender of my nieces and who their parents are doesn't mean I really know them or have a close relationship with them, or spend a great amount of time with them.

Friends, Jesus Christ was born so that He might develop a relationship with us – and so celebrating Christmas – his birth – was only the start. We need to become familiar with His life and his work as well.

So to help us do that, over the next three months we're going to walk alongside Jesus in the Gospel of Mark – watching, listening, and spending time with Him as He goes from Christmas to the Cross - so that we really get to know this baby who became the man who offered his life for us.

Now we would expect that following the life of Jesus in this chronological way would take us from his birth, through his childhood and adolescence to when he grew up and began his ministry and so on, right?

That's how a biography is written – the facts and information and stories about a person are gathered together and told in chronological order so that we might know about them.

And so in the biographies of Buddha, Mohammed, Gandhi, the Dali Lama, Karl Marx, any many other people you will find stories about how they were born, how they grew up, what their family life was like, what significant events may have shaped them as children or young people so that they grew up to be who they were and do what they did.

Not so with Jesus, because friends... Jesus is "The ONE!"

The One who had been prophesied about, the One who would bring about a better future, the One who would defeat evil and restore all things – the ONE! The Chosen One!

And when "the Chosen One" finally arrives does anyone really care where he grew up, what his family life was like, what his favorite pastimes were? Not really... The burning question on everyone's mind is can he accomplish what it has been said he will do - namely defeat evil and bring about a better future?!

And so the gospel of Mark does not bother giving us any of the details about Jesus birth, or any stories about his childhood because in light of who Jesus is – “The ONE” such things are unimportant, what matters is finding out if the Messiah can deliver what was promised!

So, what are your expectations of “The Chosen One” - what do you hope He can deliver?

Friends, this journey we are going to take alongside Jesus is not going to be about looking at the details of who his brothers and sisters were – but watching to see if the “Chosen One” can heal your sickness, provide for your needs, accept you with all your shameful secrets, make you whole again and give you life!

We want to see if He can bring hope and peace and love into this world and make a difference in the lives of people and bring about a better future!

So friends, let me assure you that as the Chosen One, the focal point on whom all our expectations rest - Jesus is off to a promising start. Why?

- Because Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist
- He was acknowledged by God as His Son
- He was given the Holy Spirit
- The Spirit enables him to battle Satan in the desert
- He returns and begins to proclaim the Kingdom of God
- He calls disciples and they follow

Friends, all of these things show us in a general way that Jesus can meet our specific individual expectations and more.

When Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist he goes to repent – to turn away from - the collective failure of the nation of Israel in their calling as “God’s Chosen People”

Initially God had called Israel to be “The Chosen One” and gave them His Law in order that they would know how to turn away from evil and live under his blessing instead. But Israel ended up misusing the Law to become exclusive instead of using it to extend God’s love and mercy.

So Jesus turns away from that, God’s law will once again become a blessing for all.

Friends – this may not be the first time we have looked to someone or something as “The ONE”

maybe we’ve put our expectations for a better life, a better future, hoped that good will overcome evil because of technology, science, education, or because we believe there’s still some good left in humanity – and in the end we’ve been let down. What was good seemed to have been subverted for evil and has become tyrannical.

Science creates biological and nuclear weapons, technology isolates us from each other, the internet was supposed to bring in a new age of sharing ideas and wisdom... but it’s number one use is to distribute pornography. You get the picture.

Friends- in his baptism Jesus turns away from all the human-born solutions that had potential to be “The One” but failed.

And in response God rips open the heavens and acknowledges Jesus as the heaven-born solution and sends the Holy Spirit on Him to empower Him so he will not fail!

Jesus is “the ONE” not because of some superhuman accomplishment, enlightenment or ability. Jesus is “the ONE” because, as we learned leading up to his birth – God so loved the world HE sent his only son... and here we see GOD acting again, confirming Jesus is “The ONE”

Then empowered by the Holy Spirit... directed by the Holy Spirit – Jesus is sent out into the desert where he faces off with Satan, that enemy who has always managed to deceive human beings so that they twist what is good into something used for evil.

We aren’t given the blow by blow details of the contest between Satan and Jesus – again that’s not important here.

What is significant is that “the ONE” is revisiting the setting which reminds us of what happened to paradise the first time Satan deceived human beings.

Adam and Eve were banished from the fertile Garden into the wilderness, weeds and thorns grew up, the animals became

predatory and the Angel of the Lord prevented them from returning to Eden and God's presence.

So Jesus returns to this setting as it were to undo it – He faces down the Deceiver and the Angels attend to him instead of oppose him. And the wild animals are no threat to him.

Now you might be wondering why we are getting info about the wild animals and not the specifics of how Jesus resisted Satan.

Well, listen to a prophecy about “the ONE” from Isaiah 65:25
“The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the LORD.

So you see that particular detail about the wild animals shows us that Jesus is indeed “the ONE” he is delivering the goods. The fact that the wild animals do not attack him is proof that Jesus is bringing in a new era, that better future where all things are restored that the prophet Isaiah speaks of.

And so having faced down the devil in the desert Jesus returns to the region of Galilee proclaiming the good news of God – the gospel. And the good news is that “The Kingdom of God has come near” meaning there's something about Himself that makes things work out the way God originally wanted it to.

So as Mark describes the opening acts of Jesus ministry He gives us an anticipatory summary in broad strokes that will be explored in finer detail in the later events of Jesus life.

A great deal of the specifics we're going to witness in Jesus ministry will be Him demonstrating how God originally wanted things to turn out in people's lives, and doing so as a way of reassuring people that a future exists where God's intentions for them will be fully realized.

Which gives us a chance to pause and reflect for a moment and ask - is the root of all our hopes and expectations regarding a better future, finding peace, making a difference in this world, etc... does it all this stem from the reality that our lives haven't turned out the way God originally intended them to?

And friends this can refer to all sorts of situations - from the obvious self destructive behaviors of addiction and workaholism, to the more subtle moral failures like pride, lust, or gluttony, and it includes situations where lives are devastated by disease, disability, divorce, or disaster.

Friends, this is not how God intended for our lives to play out, so Jesus calls us to repent.

And friends, what we need to turn away from is the belief that we human beings have the right to call the shots for our lives – because that is the root cause behind all the self destructive behaviors, moral failures and devastated lives in our world.

It also it behind what most of us consider to be the success stories of our world as well, where people identify their goals, work hard to execute plans to achieve those goals and sit back to reap the rewards of their accomplishments thinking they did it all themselves

– this too is not how God intended for people lives to turn out.

So we need to turn away from the false belief that we are masters of our own destiny and believe the good news instead. The Kingdom of Heaven is near – Jesus is King and He is the ONE to call the shots for our lives – things work better when He does, look at how the wild animals responded to him!

Now friends, here’s where the rubber hits the road.

Jesus has been revealed as “the ONE” so the burning question occupying our minds is “can he deliver the goods!” Mark has just given us evidence that He can! Jesus is the real deal, so now the question is what are you going to do about it?

At least that’s what Mark is wondering, but friends Jesus isn’t asking... He is expecting us to repent and believe in Him.

He walks up to Simon and Andrew, James and John while they are hard at work in an honest, respectable profession and commands them – “Come! Follow Me” and informs them He has another plan for their lives, “I will send you out to fish for people”

Only “the ONE” can do that! For anyone else that would be presumptuous and arrogant, but Jesus is “the ONE”

Friends, one of the things which makes the gospel different from a biography is that the gospel is one half of a conversation.

You see by sharing this account of Jesus calling the first disciples with us, Mark is conversing with us, telling us that Jesus’ command to follow Him extends to us as well. And so He is asking us what will we do?

What will we do?

Friends, Jesus is “the ONE” – the one who will bring a better future, the one who can meet your hopes and dreams, the one who will defeat evil and restore all things...what do you think we’ll do?

We’ll drop whatever else it is that we’re holding on to in the hopes that it will give us the life we’re longing for and meet

our expectations and we’ll follow after Jesus and let Him call the shots for our life!

Maybe he’ll send us out to fish for people, maybe he’ll have us heal the sick, maybe he will tell us to find a cure for cancer, maybe he will tell us to make art that is redemptive – who knows , we’ll find out as we get to know him better.

But one thing is for sure – when “the ONE” shows up, you don’t sweat the details, you just go with it. Amen.