

## Jesus Began His Ministry

**Lesson Scripture:** Mark 1:14-28 **Devotional Reading:** Matthew 4:18-25.

**Background Scripture:** Mark 1:14-28.

**Time:** A.D. 27 or 28 **Places:** by the Sea of Galilee; Capernaum

### Mark 1:14-28

<sup>14</sup> After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. <sup>15</sup> “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” <sup>18</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>19</sup> When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup> Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. <sup>22</sup> The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. <sup>23</sup> Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, <sup>24</sup> “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”

<sup>25</sup> “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” <sup>26</sup> The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

<sup>27</sup> The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” <sup>28</sup> News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

### Today’s Aim

- **Facts:** to show how Jesus began, His public ministry in Galilee.
- **Principle:** to stress that Jesus calls us to follow Him so that we can encourage others to follow Him also.
- **Application:** to urge students to look for opportunities to invite others to follow Christ.

### Introduction

Although Mark did not name himself as the author of this book, there is internal evidence that points to him. There is quite a bit of external historical evidence as well.

The first mention of Mark is in Acts 12:12, where we learn he was also named John. In verse 25 we read that he was in the company of Barnabas and Saul, and in chapter 13 we learn that he left with them on a missionary journey (v. 5). Sadly, he was not able to stay with the ministry and returned home partway into the journey (v. 13). This later was a source of contention with Barnabas and Saul resulting in their splitting up and traveling with different partners on the next missionary endeavor (15:36-40). We know Mark grew spiritually through the years, for when Paul wrote his last letter, he spoke highly of him: “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.” (2 Tim. 4:11). There is some evidence that Mark’s Gospel was the first one written; in any case, it is highly respected and valued by those who study the life of Jesus.

### Lesson Background

Our previous lesson ended in Jerusalem, the city to which Mary and Joseph had taken the baby Jesus “to present him to the Lord, ... and to offer a sacrifice” (Luke 2:22, 24). Our present lesson begins more than thirty years later, and we switch from Luke’s Gospel to Mark’s.

After His baptism Jesus was led into the wilderness where He fasted and was tempted for forty days. Afterwards, He then enlisted His first disciples, and journeyed to Cana in Galilee where He performed His first miracle. At this time He relocated His base of operations from His hometown of Nazareth to Capernaum, which is spoken thereafter as "*his own city*" (Matthew 9:1).

Having changed His residence to Capernaum, Jesus set out on a journey to Jerusalem to attend the first of the four Passovers of His ministry (John 2:23). During this visit to the Holy City, He cleansed the temple (the first of two times) and had His famous nighttime conversation with Nicodemus (John 2:12-3:21). On His return trip to Galilee, He passed through Samaria, where He had His conversation with the woman at the well. At this time John the Baptist was arrested (Luke 3:19, 20), which sets the scene for our present lesson.

### **Message Jesus Preaches (Mark 1:14, 15)**

Mark began his Gospel by introducing John the Baptist, who ministered as a herald for Jesus. He is described as ministering in the wilderness, baptizing in the Jordan River, wearing very simple clothing, and eating a meager diet. In his preaching he emphasized that Someone was coming who would be much more important than he. One day Jesus arrived at the Jordan and was baptized by John. Jesus was then immediately driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, where He was tempted by Satan.

#### ***1. What did John the Baptist emphasize in his ministry?***

Sometime after Jesus' public ministry began, John was arrested and put in prison. According to Luke 3:19,20, this happened after he rebuked Herod for his immoral relationship with his brother's wife. Jesus initially had a successful ministry in Judea, but after He heard of John's arrest, He traveled north into Galilee, where He began an extensive time of ministry (cf. Matt. 4:12). Since He and John were preaching the same message, perhaps He felt it necessary to change His place of ministry after John was so rejected.

#### ***2. What event preceded Jesus' moving His ministry to Galilee (Mark 1:14)?***

Jesus came primarily to reveal God the Father to people. He did not come primarily as a miracle worker; He performed miracles in order to prove the truth of His message. The message of this Preacher was "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). John had also preached that message (cf. Matt. 3:2). It was a declaration that the people should repent because of the nearness of the kingdom of God. The King had arrived; it was time for the people to respond.

The Greek word translated "kingdom" has in it the concept of the authority of the ruler, the activity of ruling, and the realm over which the reign takes place. Jesus was saying that the sovereign God was exercising His divine authority in sending Him to earth. It was important, therefore, that the people respond to Him accordingly.

#### ***3. What message were John and Jesus preaching, and what did it mean (v.15)?***

Jesus' statement at that particular time helps us realize that God gives His people opportune moments and situations, but not perfect ones. God has been awe-inspiring in His timeliness throughout history. He has always done the right thing at the right time.

Yet not even God was acting within a perfect setting. When Jesus began His ministry, as recorded in our lesson text, John the Baptist was in prison (verse 14), Jesus' own half-brothers did not believe in Him, and Satan already had tried to derail Jesus from His mission. The time was right, but the situation was not perfect. The same will be true in our lives today.

***4. Jesus stated in verse 15 that the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of God was at hand. What can this teach us about determining the right timing for something?***

**Challenge Jesus Issues (Mark 1:16-20)**

The Sea of Galilee lies 690 feet below sea level. It is approximately 13 miles long and 7 miles wide. It is also called the Sea of Tiberias (John 6:1), the Sea of Chinnereth (Num. 34:11), and the Lake of Gennesaret (Luke 5:1). It was the scene of a thriving and successful fishing industry during New Testament days. The Jordan River flows out of the Sea of Galilee, eventually emptying into the Dead Sea.

During His ministry in Judea, Jesus had encountered both Simon Peter and Andrew (John 1:35-42). It seems that they spent some time with Him there but then returned to their occupation of fishing. They had expressed their faith in Him as the Messiah, giving evidence of their call to faith. Now, however, as Jesus again encountered them, this time at the Sea of Galilee, they received from Him a call to follow Him permanently. It came on a day when Jesus was walking along the shore of the lake.

Simon and Andrew (who were brothers) were casting a net into the water. This was probably a circular casting net between ten and fifteen feet in diameter. After being cast it would be drawn up into the boat, where the catch would be emptied. It was a normal activity for them-as Mark noted, they were fishermen by trade; this was not a sports outing. The command Jesus issued indicated they were to follow Him as disciples. In the case of the rabbis, students sought them out; here Jesus was doing the seeking.

These men were going to learn how to evangelize. Using an analogy from their profession, Jesus said He was going to teach them how to fish for men rather than for the fish in the sea. Their obedience was instant. They left their profession permanently in response to Jesus' call.

***5. Who were the first two men Jesus called to become His followers (vs. 16-18)?***

There were many small towns dotting the shores of the Sea of Galilee during Jesus' day. Fishing was a common source of food and income for all of them. It was not unexpected, therefore, that when Jesus walked a little farther along the shore He came upon more fishermen, this time two brothers who worked with their father as part of the family business. Since they were mending their nets, we know the night's fishing was done.

Fishing was done at night, when the fish came to the surface of the lake to feed. When the sun rose and the water became hot, they would retreat to the depths, where it was cool. That explains Simon's comment in Luke 5:5. Jesus told him to launch out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch, but Simon responded by explaining that they had worked all night without catching anything. Simon thought it was totally useless to try again, but he did so in obedience to the Lord.

Against the normal course of nature, the net became so full that it began to break. Jesus used this miracle to show Simon that His teachings were indeed truth, and Simon became a loyal follower from then on.

Now the call was given to James and John. As had Simon Peter and Andrew, they immediately left their nets behind and followed Jesus. In this case their father is mentioned, for they were walking away from a lucrative family business in order to become disciples of the Lord.

Perhaps it is significant that the Lord called busy and productive people to be His followers. There is no room for laziness in the Lord's work. There are some who have no desire to work hard in life, and they choose to go into some type of ministry. All those in ministry who are doing what is required know that in reality it takes strenuous effort to see results. God wants those who will follow Him wholeheartedly and do whatever is necessary to see fruit.

## ***6. Who were the next two men Jesus called to become His followers (vs. 19,20)?***

Like other fishermen of their day, the two sets of brothers in our lesson were committed to hauling in as many fish as possible. Jesus called them to demonstrate the same passion and commitment in bringing as many people as possible to Him for forgiveness and new life.

Today God calls all Christians to participate in this fishing expedition. But some He calls to serve in paid, specialized ministries so they can devote their full energies to that mission. It has been said that the glorious difference between catching fish and catching people is that you catch fish that are alive and they die, but you catch people who are dead and they are brought to life.

## ***7. In what sense does Jesus call people today to be "fishers of men"?***

As the lesson notes, all four men apparently knew Jesus from previous encounters. But now He calls them to walk away from their way of life, source of income, and place of familiarity to serve with Him on a full-time basis. They knew Jesus before, but there was not a committed relationship.

It is one thing for us to know a little about Jesus and the Bible, but quite another to enjoy a deep, committed relationship in which we follow Him wherever He leads. People followed Jesus in the first century for a variety of reasons: curiosity, fascination, self-interest, etc. Only a few turned out to be true disciples. Jesus' disciples trusted Him enough to follow Him into hostile territories, leper colonies, pushy crowds, and eventual martyrdom. As a result, they changed the world and received eternal life! Jesus can still change the world today through committed disciples.

## ***8. How does Jesus' call to the fishermen help us understand the difference between being a committed disciple and simply being a follower?***

### **Authority Jesus Demonstrates (Mark 1:21-22)**

Capernaum was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus made this city the headquarters for His ministry while in the north, especially after He was rudely rejected in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-31). It was one of the more prosperous fishing villages and was especially significant because of a major road that passed through it and because Rome had a garrison stationed there. Such a central location would be beneficial to the spreading of the gospel.

On the first Sabbath after He arrived in Capernaum (along with His four new disciples), Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. While such ministry was usually reserved for the local rabbis, qualified visiting men were allowed to read and interpret the Scriptures. As Jesus taught, those listening immediately noticed something unique about Him and what He said. His teaching was much more authoritative than that of the scribes, and apparently, He taught in such a way that people could readily understand. The content of His teaching amazed them.

It was customary for scribes to bring witnesses before the people to validate their interpretations. With Jesus there were no such witnesses. Rather, He taught authoritatively, without needing others to speak for Him. Unlike the scribes, who mostly quoted the sayings of their predecessors, Jesus obviously had come with a message directly from God.

## ***9. Where did Jesus go soon after arriving in Capernaum, and why was He allowed to participate there (vs. 21,22)?***

### **Demon Jesus Terrifies (Mark 1:23-26)**

The astonishment of the people over Jesus' authoritative teaching might have raised some questions about His qualifications to do such teaching. It was probably no accident that the next event recorded is Jesus' first encounter with a demon ("an unclean spirit"). If He could exercise authority over demons,

certainly He possessed the authority to teach as He did. The man with the demon was present in the synagogue. Demon possession was quite common in Israel in Jesus' day and was easily recognized.

When a demon possessed a person, it took control over the person's actions and speech; so it was not unusual that the demon in the man attending the synagogue cried out to Jesus through the voice of the person. This demon instantly knew who Jesus was and the authority He possessed and reacted according to that knowledge. Unlike many of the people, the demon recognized Jesus as "the Holy One of God."

The two questions asked by the demon are filled with implications. The first question was *"What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?"* The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., Victor) explains it this way: "These words translate a Hebrew idiom which expresses the incompatibility of opposing forces (cf. 5:7; Josh. 22:24; Jud. 11:12; 2 Sam. 16:10; 19:22)." The second question in Mark 1:24, *"Have you come to destroy us?"* refers to being ruined rather than annihilated. Jesus was a threat to demonic activities.

### ***10. How was Jesus interrupted as He taught in the synagogue, and what was said to Him at that time (vs. 23,24)?***

The demon spoke of "we" and "us" rather than merely himself. He obviously understood that Jesus was a threat not just to him but to all demonic forces. He was the Judge, and the entire demonic world was under His divine judgment. James 2:19 says, *"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder."*

### ***11. Why did the demon refer to himself in plural terms rather than singular?***

Jesus never allowed demons to give testimony regarding Him. That is why His first command in this case was for the demon to be quiet, or, literally, to be muzzled (Mark 1:25). The word of demons could not be allowed as proof to Israel of who He was or what authority He possessed. That had to come solely from Him, His Father, and (eventually) the Holy Spirit working through His disciples. Verse 34 confirms this: *"And Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demon speak because they knew who he was."*

Skeptics today may claim that what the ancient people thought of as "demon possession" actually was an illness such as schizophrenia or epilepsy. But the ancient people certainly knew the difference between demon possession and other problems; Matthew 4:24 shows this distinction very well. Since children could have evil spirits, the cause of demon possession is not always moral (see Mark 9:14-29).

The second command from Jesus was that the demon come out of the man. This was followed by convulsions and shrieking as the demon tried as hard as he could to resist the order but was unable to do so. He evidently shook the man violently, throwing him into a severe spasm that threw him to the ground. He then gave a final shriek of protest as he unwillingly left the body of the man he had inhabited for some time. The word of Jesus alone was irresistible. Jesus' power and authority were far greater than his own.

Jesus' two commands to Hold thy peace and come out of him are quite forceful. Note that this encounter occurs in what seems to be an unlikely place—a synagogue. All sorts of people come to church!

### ***12. How did Jesus respond to this (vs. 25,26)?***

The most obvious way is to surrender heart and will to the lordship and authority of Jesus Christ, fully renouncing any claim that the devil may have on us. At the time of our conversion, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us (Acts 2:38). The Spirit is more powerful than the evil one (1 John 4:4), but allowing the Spirit to lead fully and to cleanse us is an ongoing process (Galatians 5:16-26).

We also protect ourselves from the devil's lies and temptations by filling ourselves with the Bible's truth. In a practical sense, we must be realistic about the danger of Satan's influence, even in a religious setting like the synagogue that we see in today's text. We should take Satan and his demons seriously, but not live in fear. Jesus is still Lord.

***13. Jesus rescued many who were harassed and hindered by unclean spirits. How can we limit the devil's influence in our own lives?***

#### ***Fame Jesus Earns (Mark 1:27,28)***

The people who witnessed this miracle had never seen such authority over the demons before. Their first question was "*What is this?*" They wondered whether a new doctrine was being presented, for whatever it was they were witnessing caused even the demons to obey! They were astounded and stupefied by it all.

Having read of this reaction from the people, it does not surprise us to read next that Jesus' reputation rapidly spread all over Galilee. J. W. Shepard made this interesting observation: "It is no wonder that fame took wings and flew into every place of the whole region of Galilee round about. He had rung the bell of the universe. The fame of this day's sermon and of His power over demons would soon draw great multitudes from all the surrounding country about Him" (The Christ of the Gospels, Eerdmans).

The Messiah had come and was beginning to make Himself known among His people. The offer of salvation was there. How would they respond?

***14. What was the response of the people to Jesus' expulsion of the demon (vs. 27,28)?***

#### **Conclusion**

When Jesus calls us to follow Him, He calls us to a life of discipleship. We are called to follow His example and commitment to the kingdom of God. That means telling others about Him so that they too can come into the kingdom of God with us. Every Christian is called to tell others about Jesus.

Jesus is calling you to His service. It may be to become a preacher, a teacher, an elder, or a deacon. Add your desire to serve to your talent and spiritual giftedness to do so. To these also add the need that exists, and you have a call "similar" to that given to Peter, Andrew, James, and John. When you answer that call, you submit to Jesus' authority.

#### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, may we, like the four fishermen, gladly accept the invitation of Jesus to follow Him and become fishers of men. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

#### **Thought to Remember**

May we never cease to hear the call of Jesus.