

January 28, 2018    The Timeline    Mark 1:14-20

It still surprises me...shouldn't but it does...how much there is to learn about what the Bible teaches us about Jesus ministry. It makes the point if nothing else, that I am clearly a work in progress. I do not understand it all, and if I ever thought I did, I am having to admit there are whole areas of the New Testament that I thought I understood, but I am having to revise that understanding.

So I want to begin this morning by quoting a blurb I stumbled across in a commentary this past week. He writes, "It never was Christ's way to demand a full-fledged faith for a beginning. It never was HIS way to hold men back from discipleship, on the ground of an incomplete creed. And quite certainly that is HIS way today. Jesus puts HIMSELF alongside HIS brethren. HE bids them attach themselves to HIM at any point they can. HE takes them with the faith they can offer HIM. HE is content with that as a beginning; and from that HE leads them on, as HE led the first group on, step by step, to the inmost secret of who HE is and to the full glory of discipleship." That is from James S Stewart's "The Life And Teaching OF Jesus Christ, pp. 66-67.

I offer that as encouragement to you, and as encouragement to myself. There are times when I must admit, I would have thought after 55 years of study...I would have understood some things that seem basic, better than I did and do. This matter of the timeline of Jesus ministry seems like a new world to me. I simply had not noticed that the balance of the ministry of our Lord took place in Galilee. And to be utterly honest the whole question of the timeline only arose out of the two pilgrimages Barbara and I made to Israel.

One of my commentaries makes this simple statement. "Mark skips over the Lord's Judean ministry (see John 1-4:54 and begins with the great Galilean ministry, a period of one year and nine months." I feel like I have been swimming around that idea for about a year, and never dared to so boldly express it. Out of Jesus three years of ministry, a year and nine months was spent in Galilee. It set the world on its ear. Laid the groundwork for centuries of change in terms of the effect of the teaching and lives touched. It set the stage for HIS time in Jerusalem and HIS journey to Calvary, the tomb and the resurrection.

For Mark's Gospel that means the vast majority of what we read in it, was about the time in Galilee, the journey south to Jerusalem, Holy Week, the crucifixion, and Easter's glory. Having told us in the most basic of outlines, the story of Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist, Mark tells us Jesus went into the wilderness of Judea, where among other things HE experienced temptation. Believers have a tendency to worry about temptation. Remember this: it is not sinful to be tempted. In fact what temptation reveals is that we are significant enough as disciples of our Saviour, to warrant the attention of the Tempter. The tempter only tempts those whose power to influence others, he is worried about. Temptation is a sign that God is walking with us, that we have our eyes on the prize of eternal life through faith in our Saviour and Lord.

As Mark unfolds the timeline.... It goes like this. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, HE spent time in the wilderness, HE began HIS ministry, and after John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee where he remained and ministered in many towns and villages, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee itself. And crowds came to follow HIS every step, to receive His ministry in the power of the Spirit of God, and to hear HIS teaching. After John the Baptist was imprisoned. And if you do not remember, you can probably guess who would have jailed John the Baptist. Mark does not even mention it. It was Herod. I have said John the Baptist was not a diplomat. He had denounced Herod for marrying his brother Phillip's wife. Caught between his wife's anger and John's popularity, he ordered John the Baptist's arrest. After that occurred, Jesus went to Galilee and preached the good news of God.

And what is that Good News, that gospel that Jesus proclaims in power and with authority, signs and wonders following as the evidence that it is true? Very simply it is that, "the time has come." Now is the hour. The waiting is over. This is it. The Kingdom of God is near. And in light of that fact it is the time to repent of sin and embrace the good news. I am certain that some of you will be familiar with the gospel song, The King Is Coming. What Jesus proclaims in Galilee, is that the King has come. HE is here in the world, in Galilee. And that is why the word spreads like wildfire, like those fires we saw on television in the hills of California, that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus popularity and the general public's embracing of HIS message raises alarm, causes panic among the Jewish clergy, and yet they dare not touch HIM in Galilee because of HIS popularity. The pot simmers, then boils and becomes a perfect storm when Jesus chooses to go to Jerusalem, and heads south.

Two things about the Galilee ministry. This is not the only place that Jesus performed miracles. But the miracles in Galilee lend veracity to HIS claims of being the king, and that the age of the Kingdom of God has begun. Miracles take people beyond the cool reality of ideas. We Presbyterian Christians tend to think ideas are really important. We often overlook this simple reality. Miracles are not ideas. They are based in real world experience. You see, you hear, you can touch the evidence...miracles ring with the thunder clap of reality. He was blind but he can see. He was blind for years. He can see! He was lame and he walks! He was diseased and he is whole and healthy. He was demonized and he is praising God and bowing and submitting to Jesus....following Jesus. A changed person. Everybody knows. The evidence is clear. Miracles are the sign of the presence of the Kingdom. Signs and Wonders make it plain that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Why is the timeline important? For one thing it is easy to get confused. The disciples were not always with Jesus. Did you hear that? The disciples were not with Jesus from the time of HIS emergence from the wilderness. After John the Baptist was arrested and put in prison by Herod, Jesus went into Galilee where he ministered for the greater part of two years. In Galilee, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon Peter and Andrew casting a net into the lake (Galilee, that one body of fresh water in Israel) fed by the Jordan river. Jesus approached the fishermen and said, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

And here is a miracle of sorts. "At once, they left their nets and followed Jesus." No counting of the cost in a boat and equipment, no tallying of the lack of income from the sale of fish to the salt fish factories that fed an Empire. They walked away from their lives up to that point and embraced something new. Well, not quite. This is probably not their first brush with Jesus. If they have not seen HIM heal and teach they have heard the stories. They have talked around the fire at night about what Jesus does. About what Jesus says. About lives that have changed forever! When the opportunity comes, when Jesus makes the offer they grab on with both hands.

This is important. If you have never heard this before, hear it today. The disciples were not with Jesus from the beginning. They were with HIM from the beginning of the Galilee ministry. And they learned fast what we are slow to learn. They are going to be fishing from now on, for people. As Simon and Andrew follow Jesus along the beach they come across another boat, and James and John, brothers are mending a net. Jesus makes the invitation. And they too leave everything and simply follow Jesus.

The timeline helps us understand. But I would leave you with this thought to stir your minds and touch your souls. How often did anyone say come and hear what Jesus has to say? What men and women tended to say was, "Come and see...." And there were those who definitely said, "We want to see Jesus." They were certain something very special would happen if Jesus was going to be present. They had heard stories. They wanted to see HIM for themselves.

Let us pray;

Precious Lord Jesus. Wherever you are present the Kingdom of God is in evidence. We pray that in our community as we brush up against our neighbours we might be used of you as evidence of your presence. Make us to be servants and good neighbours. Fill us with your grace that we might be of assistance, and bring your peace and love to bear on the relationships you privilege us to have and enjoy. We would honour you with our lives. Dwell in us and mark our steps as we follow Jesus. Amen