



\*“THE BIBLE: GOSPEL (MT. MK. LK. JN.)”

**Biblical Text:** Mark 1:1-11

Dr. Michael F. Gardner, Senior Pastor  
Old Mission United Methodist Church

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\*The Gospel - \*The Good News - The Evangel - \*in Greek Evangelion (εὐαγγελίω)

It is a word used 76 times in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> And we use it all the time in the Church. We talk about the Gospel, Gospel preaching, Gospel Hymns, etc.

It was a word prominently used in the Bible, New Testament by the \*Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John - but also by Paul and Peter and John of Patmos.

But I wonder how many times we stop to ask, “What does “it” mean?” The “Gospel” in simplest terms is the earliest Christian creed *“Jesus is Lord!”*<sup>2</sup> (Romans 10:9 and I Cor. 12:3)

When I ask children what part of the Bible they like the best, I almost always get this answer: **“That part about Jesus.”** And that’s not only true for children. It is true for almost all of us, since we are Christians. **It’s certainly true for me.**

It’s even true for those who really aren’t interested in religion or the Church, as documented in \*Dan Kimball’s book, They Like Jesus But Not the Church. I know, it kind of stings, but here’s the deal, people are just not that interested in *“organized religion.”* **When you put it that way, I don’t find it all that appealing either.**

It turns out that people, in the New Testament and now, were and are interested in Jesus, whether they know him or not. They might have heard some pretty ugly things about the Church, but almost no one has anything bad to say about Jesus.

So, today we’ll begin looking at the 27 books of the \*New Testament which tell the story of Jesus. Over the next four weeks we are going to look at four distinct types of writing. Gospel, Acts of the Apostles, Letters, and the Revelation. \*You’ll find this week’s daily Bible readings in the narthex after the service or on our website.

\*If you open your Bibles with me... go ahead, I’ll wait .. I love the sound of rustling pages ... we’ll see the purpose of the four Gospels is to introduce people to Jesus. Every Evangelist begins his Gospel a different way. Let’s look at how they begin:

\*Matthew, the most Hebrew of the Gospels, in Matthew 1:1: \*

*“An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> James Strong, Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Copyright © 2009 and earlier, Hendrickson Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 10:9 and I Corinthians 12:3, “Jesus is Lord!” – from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Matthew 1:1, New Revised Standard Version Bible.

\*Mark, the first Gospel and the most concise, in Mark 1:1, part of our text today: \*  
*“The beginning of (the Gospel,) the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”*<sup>4</sup>

\*Luke, who also wrote Acts, who had access to both Mark and Matthew in Luke 1:3:  
 \**“I decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus...”*<sup>5</sup> (Theophilus meaning “One who loves God.”)

\*John, the 4<sup>th</sup> Evangelist, the most philosophical, to a Greek audience in John 1:1: \*  
*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*<sup>6</sup>

Bible scholars tell us that before any of the Gospels were written down, the things Jesus said and taught were told in oral tradition, as the Christian movement grew. It was maybe seventy years before Mark’s Gospel was written down. \*

Of course that’s just a guess. But what we do know is that that all three of the earliest Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, tell the story of Jesus in about the same order of events. We call them the “Synoptic Gospels.” \*

And we know that Matthew and Luke\* seem to both have had access to Mark, and another common source, since a lot of verses appear, \*word for word in common.

And we think those early Gospels would have looked something like this. \* That’s the first page of Mark from one of the oldest existing Bibles, the \*Codex Sinaiticus or "Sinai Bible," an ancient, Greek parchment from about the 4th century.

Today’s text is from that Gospel of Mark, the earliest written Gospel. His style is very brief, sometimes blunt and abrupt, with a strong emphasis on action verbs. And his favorite word is *“immediately,”* which he uses in \*verse 12, one verse after our text, for the first time, and then 26 more times, more than any other Gospel writer.

His story is compelling, the entire Gospel can be easily read in one sitting. Today’s text begins, unlike Matthew, Luke, or John not with the birth of Jesus - but with the beginning of the Good News, when Jesus appears on the scene in his Baptism.

Again, Mark 1:1 starts with: \* *“The beginning of (the Gospel,) the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.”*<sup>7</sup> And he ends his first sequence by letting us know, and leaving no doubt about just who Jesus is. Mark 1:11 says: \**“And a voice came from heaven, (saying,) “You are my Beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.”*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Mark 1:1, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Like 1:3, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. John 1:1, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 1:1, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>8</sup> Op. Cit. Mark 1:11, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, (alternate translation, see footnote in the Biblical text.)

In between, briefly, John the Baptist appears on the pages of his Gospel, Mark 1:4 says: *“John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”*<sup>9</sup>

Matthew 3:1 tells us more about John’s message: *“In those days John the Baptist came ... saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’”*<sup>10</sup> And Luke 3:7 tells us the harsh edge his message had: *“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee the wrath to come?”*<sup>11</sup> I’ve never tried to get away with that on a Sunday morning!

In stark contrast, Mark 1:15 tells us Jesus’ message: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; ‘Repent, and believe ... the good news.’”*<sup>12</sup>

See the difference? When Jesus began his public ministry, he picked up the repentance message of John, with a different appeal, the same message with a different emphasis, *“Repent,”* he said, *“and believe the good news!”*<sup>13</sup>

And there’s a world of difference between those Gospel messages – even today! It is the difference between bad news and good news, between guilt and grace!

So many Christians think to repent is being sorry and asking for forgiveness, and admitting we are sinners, which we surely are. But that’s not the Good News!

*\*I love the scene in Monty Python’s Holy Grail, where the clouds open and God appears. Arthur and his knights are terrified, but God says, \* “Oh stop groveling!”*

The Bible word for repent is *metanoia* - a Greek word which means *to change direction* – to turn your direction around toward God’s grace and forgiveness.

*\*The Good News that Jesus shared and came to give is that we can stop beating ourselves up and make a new start. So we can “stop groveling!”* Blame, guilt, anxiety, and unworthiness - all lead to a feeling of separation from God.

And separation from God is never the last word, never the final judgement. Jesus said, *“Repent and believe the Good News!”*

**Believe the Good News. It’s for you. Let us pray.**

<sup>9</sup> Op. Cit. Mark 1:4, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Matthew 3:1, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. See Luke 3:7 *New Revised Standard Version*.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Mark 1:15, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

<sup>13</sup> See Mark 1:15. Holy Bible: *New International Version*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission.