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“The Art of the Start”

Mark 1:12-20

Introduction

Success in many endeavors is often achieved by beginning well and ending well. Sure what is in the middle is very significant but often how you begin and how you end is what is most memorable.

This is true in any sports competition whether it be football, golfing, or race car driving.

This is true in marriage—you want your marriage to get off on the right foot and you want it to finish strong.

This is true in academics—you want to start off well so that you don't dig yourself a hole that you can't get out of later on in the term.

This is true in a job. The first day, the first week, first quarter you give it all you have as you are on a learning curve and you want to show your boss that he made a good decision in adding you to the team.

Starting well is always a noble goal to attain. Even starting a sermon well helps grab attention, introduce the theme, and create a desire to hear the rest of the message.

Today, I want us to see Jesus starting well! We will do this as we continue preaching through the gospel of Mark. Mark is a gospel that wastes no time getting to the ministry of Jesus Christ. In Mark's characteristic fast paced style, he puts us right in the middle of the action as he described Jesus baptism which we studied last week.

Last week we learned that Jesus traveled several miles to be baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist. He did this to fulfill all righteousness! He did this as part of his humiliation—of identifying with sinners, though he never sinned! Then the heavens rip open! The Spirit of God descends upon Jesus, empowering Him for the ministry He is to begin. And then God the Father affirms His deep, infinite, to-the-end, tender, love for the Son—the Son in whom He has always delighted in

and the Son whom He delights in even now as He as fulfilling all righteousness! This was an earth-shaking, eye-popping, ear-splitting event. But notice what happens next! In characteristic fashion, Mark uses the term “euthus”--immediately! Right on the heels of his baptism, what happens? The unexpected! Prepare for that often in Mark's gospel! The unexpected! After such a majestic, stupendous event, you would have thought a celebration would have broken out! A party! A reception! Some sort of festive occasion as the Holy Trinity had just appeared together in Israel. But there is no time to relish, to bask in this momentous occasion. No time to enjoy and savor the event. Rather look what happens next. It should take our breath away!

“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. ” (Mark 1:12–20, ESV)

Now in this text I want us to see the essential qualities that devoted followers of Jesus Christ exhibit in ministry. They should characterize us at the start, at the end and all throughout our Christian lives. We will learn so much from Christ here about “the art of the start” of our ministry for Him, but even if you lapsed in some of these areas, I pray that the Holy Spirit would use this text to jump-start us in our Christian ministry for Jesus Christ. I pray that these would be true in our life ministry as a local fellowship of believers as well.

Start learning how to defeat temptation

The first thing we learn about our Lord's ministry that is critical to ours is that he knew how to defeat temptation. A devoted follower of Jesus Christ knows how to defeat temptation.

Expect the unexpected in Mark: Heaven had just opened up in the previous story. Now hell does as Jesus is tempted by the adversary, Satan. But notice how this unfolds. “The Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. ” The same Spirit who descends on him now drives him out, impels him to go into the wilderness. Without a moment to breath, Jesus is put into the fray of spiritual battle and sent to pursue earthly ministry.

There is a divine necessity here but there is no reluctance on the part of Jesus to go. Jesus went where the Spirit impelled him and so must every follower of Jesus Christ. There is this strong sense of the Spirit's compulsion in Jesus' life. It is

upon Him. And meeting Satan in this hour was to be expected for “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” (1 John 3:8). This wouldn't be the last time the Son of God would do battle with Satan and his forces. In fact, spiritual warfare is a prominent feature of Mark's gospel. So instead of avoiding this battle Jesus takes the offensive and goes into the wilderness, impelled by the Spirit of God!

This was not some sort of unfortunate mishap or hardship resulting from some miscalculation by Jesus! Oh, no, it was part of the divine plan and it establishes the free, sovereign agency of Jesus who chooses to do God's will rather than his own desires.

And note, it wasn't an overnight stay. He was in the wilderness for 40 days. This was perhaps analogous to the forty days Moses spent on top of Mt. Sinai receiving the Law, of Elijah traveling in the wilderness for 40 days back to Mt. Horeb where angels fed him. There's a likely parallel to Israel wandering for 40 years in the wilderness. And some even see the closest parallel between David and Goliath for Goliath taunted and terrified Israel for 40 days before David courageously battled the giant and won.

What we do know is that Jesus was there in this wilderness for 40 days? Didn't eat or drink that entire time. And that he was with wild animals—a point that only Mark brings out—which likely represents the horrors and dangers that Jesus encountered those 40 days.

Now we are not told specifically where Jesus was in this Judean wilderness. The traditional site is simply called “The devastation” in Hebrew, an area of 35 miles by 15 miles of wild, severe, uninhabited desert that contains rocky, craggy peaks and cliffs and frightening ravines and wall of cliffs that plunge hundreds of feet into these ravines.

It is a scene of utter desolation, abandonment, peril, horror, loneliness and danger. Surrounded by lions, hyenas, jackals, wolves, panthers, foxes, and jaguars—all of which had been spotted in that region according to sources back then.

There are some interesting tie-ins here. First, there is a comparison here between Adam, the first, and Jesus, the last Adam. Whereas Adam encountered his temptation in a Garden of Paradise and succumbed to it, Jesus encountered this temptation in anti-Eden and prevailed over it. Whereas Adam faced temptation among animals that were tamed and he had named, Jesus faced temptation among animals that were hostile.

Also the “wild animals” factoid might have resonated with the Roman Christians to whom this letter was written with in mind, for many Christians in Rome had too been thrown to the wild beasts in the arenas around Rome as they were persecuted for their faith.

But the main truth in this paragraph is that Jesus was being tempted by Satan. Jesus is the main character of this story. He is in control. God is control of Satan even here. Satan is secondary.

Now please note that the Bible believes in the personal existence of Satan. Matthew (4:1, 3, 5, 8); Luke (4:2, 3, 6, 13; 8:12); Peter (Acts 10:38; I Peter 5:8); Paul (Rom. 16:20; Eph. 4:27; 6:11); the author of Hebrews (2:14); James (4:7); John (Gospel 13:2, 27; I John 3:8, 10, 12; 5:18, 19; Rev. 12:9; 20:2, 7, 10); and Jude (see his epistle verse 9). So did also Jesus himself (Matt. 6:13; 13:39; 25:41; Mark 3:23, 26; 4:15; 8:33; Luke 4:8; 10:18; 11:18; 13:6; 22:3, 31; John 8:44) all speak and teach that Satan exists.

He is called Satan, which means “adversary” 36 times int the NT, while he is called the devil [diabolos] 35 times. Under him are vast legions of demons.

This will not be Jesus' last encounter with Satan. The first miracle Mark records Jesus doing involves casting out demons. It was likely not even his first temptation. Hard to mention he went all through his childhood, his first 30 years never being tempted.

And let's be clear that although the Spirit impelled him to go into the wilderness it was Satan who was tempting Jesus! God, not even the Holy Spirit of God, can tempt anyone (James 1).

The word “tempted” that Mark uses can mean either put to test in the sense of proving ones' character or to solicit toward evil. Likely both meanings apply here. I will let the Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest explain. He states this word “tempted means:

“to try intentionally, and with the purpose of discovering what good or evil, power or weakness, was in a person.” It means therefore in its basic usage “to put to the test to see what good or evil there is in a person.” Then, since men so often break down under such a test and display the evil there is in them, the word came to mean “to tempt” in the sense of soliciting a person to do evil. The word is seen in its two uses here. The Last Adam was being put to the test to show that He was equipped and ready for His ministry as prophet, priest, and king. The universe was looking on, God the Father and the holy angels, the fallen angels, and the demons. What a battle royal was waged there. What tremendous things were at issue. But not only was He put to the test. He was solicited to do evil by Satan.¹

¹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader* (Mk 1:13). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Now, this phrase “being tempted” supports the idea that Jesus was not just tempted at the end of the forty days alone, but rather was tempted throughout this whole forty day period. Of course, we know that at the end of these forty days came the three big temptations: to eat bread, to jump off the pinnacle of the temple and to worship Satan in return for all the kingdoms of this world.

Now we know that as the Son of God we know that Jesus could not have sinned because God cannot sin. He is what we call impeccable—which means sinless. Nevertheless we know that Jesus was genuinely tempted. In fact, his temptation was greater than ours in the sense that he never gave in! And you know what often happens when you resist temptation for so long, it gets stronger and stronger.

The only difference between Christ's and ours is that he had no internal incentive or desire for evil like we do (James 1:14): Nevertheless the temptation—that is, the sense of need, the consciousness of being urged by Satan to satisfy this need, the knowledge of having to resist the tempter, and the struggle to which this gave rise—was real even for Christ.

So we might say that ultimately the reality of the temptation of the perfect Savior is shrouded in mystery. He faced real temptation! But he never sinned. IN fact, he really couldn't sin! But the temptation was just as real as any temptation that we face. *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* (Hebrews 4:15, ESV)

And what also makes his temptation more powerful is that he faced it alone. Away from everyone and everybody. On his own. Nobody is there to support him, to help him through it, to pray for him, with him, nobody to strengthen him, one one to encourage him.

We might say overall that his temptation was to take the easy way to kingship, to take the shortcut, so to speak, to being the Savior. It was never really a temptation to a give up his sovereignty, royalty, privileges or exaltation. But Satan offered him a way to abandon his humiliation and to take a short cut. If he had given in and did it his way and if he had sidestepped the cross, the reality is He wouldn't have had anything to reign over. Praise God He didn't take the shortcut.

Thank God! Christ faced this temptation successfully! He had to face it—to conquer his archenemy, to overthrow the usurper, to crush the head of the serpent, to destroy the works of the devil. And He did overcome the most powerful temptations Satan could throw at him.

Mark ends his account of the temptation by stating, “And the angels were ministering to him.” They are ministering to him (again imperfect tense), just like they did to Elijah in his 40 days in the desert.

Now what is interesting is that Mark, unlike Matthew never tells us that Jesus defeated these temptations. I find that interesting and I think purposeful for in it Mark is giving a glimpse of the entire ministry of Jesus where he is dependent on the Spirit, engaged in demonic warfare, and is ministered to by angels.

William Lane says it this way, “It is the evangelist's distinctive understanding that Jesus did not win the decisive victory during the forty days nor did he cease to be tempted. Jesus is thrust into the wilderness to be confronted with Satan and temptation. It is this confrontation which is itself important, since it is sustained throughout Jesus' ministry.”

What lessons are there in this account for us? Well, I think it teaches as John MacArthur argues, “Effective ministry is done by those who triumph over temptation. Effective ministry is done by those who triumph over temptation and sin. We don't triumph over it in the sense that our Lord Jesus did, but in the sense that a faithful servant of the Lord does.

“Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” (2 Timothy 2:20–22, ESV)

God blesses and empowers a pure servant. Effective ministry is done by those who enter into the triumph of Christ are those who walk in obedience and holiness before Him.

How do we defeat temptation? First, just like Jesus, the best way to defeat temptation is to be filled with the Spirit! *“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” (Romans 8:5, ESV)* So to defeat the devil, we must live by the Spirit of Christ.

I love this story from Martin Luther's life. When Martin Luther was asked how he overcame the Devil, he replied, “Well, when he comes knocking upon the door of my heart, and asks ‘Who lives here?’ the dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says, ‘Martin Luther used to live here, but he has moved out. Now I live here.’” When Christ fills our lives, Satan has no entrance. ²

2 Hughes, R. K. (1989). *Mark : Jesus, servant and savior*. Preaching the Word (32). Westchester,

The second way to defeat temptation is to be filled with the Word. *“I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”* (Psalm 119:11, ESV) As Matthew recounts, Jesus quoted a lot of Scripture to Satan in resisting temptation. We must do likewise.

So a devoted follower of Jesus Christ knows how to defeat temptation. Through the fullness of Christ and the fullness of the Word which will make us victorious over sin. We must submit ourselves therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from us (James 4:4)

Start proclaiming the clear message of the gospel

What happens next and what does it teach us?

Mark continues, *“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”*” (Mark 1:14–15, ESV)

Here we learn that a devoted follower of Jesus Christ proclaims the clear message of the gospel. This is where ministry begins: proclaiming the gospel.

Now Mark skips several months to a year in Jesus' life from verse 13 to verse 14. We move from the time of Jesus' baptism and death to the time “after John was arrested.” This is often called “the year of obscurity” in Jesus' life. And Mark just skips right over it because he wants to show how Christ immediately exercises authority over sin and sinners.

Just like he left out a lot about the temptation of Christ, Mark selectively omits the events that happen in Jesus' life over the next year. From reading the other gospels, especially John, we learn that Jesus ministers in southern Israel—in Judea—immediately after his baptism and temptation. In fact, this is when Peter and Andrew, James and John first meet Jesus and are likely converted. It is in this time that Jesus cleanses the temple and performs the first miracle we know of: turning water into wine. Several months later John is arrested [literally handed over which is a prefigurement of what will happen to Christ later] and Jesus departs from Judea to Galilee where he spends the majority of his ministry. John's appointed ministry as forerunner is now complete and Jesus' ministry really ramps up.

So he leaves Judea and he must needs travel through Samaria (a region between Judea and Galilee). Mark doesn't tell us about this trip in which Jesus ministers to the woman at a well and an entire Samaritan village becomes followers of Him.

Mark will tell us more about John's arrest, imprisonment and eventual martyrdom in Mark 6:14-28 but for right now, he just alludes to this, yet in a way again that does not escape the attention of his Roman readers who were presently under persecution. John here sets the standard for would be followers of Jesus Christ reminding us that devoted followers of Jesus Christ must often proclaim the gospel not in comfort or freedom but in adversity and suffering. This text again would remind us to pray for the persecuted church which stands in the mainstream of Christian history through the centuries.

After Jesus passes through Samaria following John's arrest, he “came into Galilee” and Mark where Jesus enjoys his greatest ministry success. This is the region he returns to after his death and resurrection and where he re-commissions his faithful disciples for effective ministry.

Immediately Jesus begins proclaiming [that is heralding] the gospel [the good news which is clearly defined by Paul later on as the message of the life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension back to heaven of Jesus Christ]-the gospel of God [the gospel that comes from God. God is the source of this gospel!].

Someone has said, “God only had one Son and He was a preacher. And God only has one method of spreading the gospel out and that is preaching!” And of course, by preaching, they mean proclaiming, like a herald does the official message he has been given—proclaiming with authority the person and work of Jesus Christ.

That's what you and I are commissioned to do as well—to speak with authority—the authority of the Word of God—the good news of the gospel whose source is God and whose subject is His Son Jesus Christ!

The gospel of God concerning Jesus Christ is this:

“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Romans 8:32, ESV)

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ” (2 Corinthians 5:20–21, ESV)

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ” (Galatians 4:4–5, ESV)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. ” (Ephesians 2:8–10, ESV)

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” (Titus 3:4–7, ESV)

Jesus was saying, “The time [kairos—the critical or opportune time; not chronos which has to do with the progression of time] is fulfilled! The final phase of redemption history is upon you! It 's here! God's hour has struck! Literally “The time has been fulfilled—that is—it has come upon you with continuing results now!

“The kingdom of God is at hand!” It is near both in terms of time and in terms of presence! Luke records this message in a fuller version. Listen to it:

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ” (Luke 4:16–21, ESV)

What a message! The kingdom is at hand! Now when you read about “the kingdom”, please understand there are three senses of that kingdom. First, there is the sense of the present reality of the kingdom in the hearts of men who believe in Jesus. Jesus uses it in this sense in Luke 17:21, “Behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.” Secondly there is a future millennial kingdom, which is detailed in several places in God's Word but especially Revelation 20. And then there is really the continuation of that millennial kingdom forever in what we call the eternal kingdom. So you have a spiritual kingdom right now, a coming millennial kingdom, and a future eternal kingdom!

Now how do you enter this kingdom? What is the response to this gospel, this good news that the kingdom is at hand because the King Jesus has come! Here's the simple message, folks, that devoted followers of Jesus will proclaim: repent and believe in the gospel! Literally, it's present tense so it reads, “Be repenting and be believing in the gospel [the good news of Jesus Christ]. Keep on doing these things. But start doing it now!

Repent and believe the gospel is the clear message of salvation! The message of the gospel is not find your purpose in life or experience your best life now! It is repent and believe the gospel! Keep on repenting, keep on trusting Christ!

But I am telling you, that message is so muddled and lost today! Obviously it lost by non-Christian religions such as Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. It is also obviously lost by the cults such as Mormonism and Jehovah's Witness just to name too. It is lost by so-called Christendom, that is those who claim to be Christian but preach another gospel such as Roman Catholicism. And it is sadly even lost by much of contemporary evangelicalism which grows increasingly wary of telling men they must repent. This brand of Christianity says that the contemporary man needs a message of hope, not fear!

But as D. Edmond Hiebert has written, "The call to repentance will never become obsolete until human sin has been completely vanquished!"

Although "Repent" was the constant musical refrain of Christ and apostolic preaching, today it has been barely reduced to a whisper in the church! In one of the best selling Christian books of all time

If Jesus were preaching today to our culture, he would call people to repent of materialism and their sexual immorality that violates God's law. He would renounce gossiping and jealousies, lying and being a fake. He would proclaim, "Repent from your sin!" And He would tell you and me to do it now! There would be an urgency to this! Now is the time to repent!

The note of urgency in the summons to repent is sharpened, for now the nature of the gospel is clearer than ever before. . . . Provision has been made for men to repent, but there is not time for delay. Only through repentance can a man participate with joy in the kingdom when it does break forth. Jesus accordingly calls men to radical decision. In Jesus men are confronted by the word and act of God; he himself is the crucial term by which belief and unbelief come to fruition. Jesus proclaims the kingdom not to give content but to convey a summons. He stands as God's final word of address to man in man's last hour. Either a man submits to the summons of God or he chooses this world and its riches and honor. The either/or character of this decision is of immense importance and permits of no postponement. That is what repentance is all about. . . . Jesus himself, though veiled in the midst of men, becomes the crucial term by which men enter the kingdom of God, or exclude themselves from it. What he does is the work of God. (William Lane, p. 66)

In the same call to repent, which meant to turn around, to turn from something, Jesus was telling people to believe in the gospel! Believing in the gospel presupposes repentance. It is comprehensive repentance and faith. Not this repentance a la carte variety so prevalent today!

So a devoted follower of Jesus Christ proclaims the clear gospel of God: a call to lifelong repentance and faith. Genuine repentance prepares the heart for true faith in the gospel and the then faith in the gospel produces evangelical repentance. Repentance without faith leads to despair; faith without repentance is presumption.

Start following Christ radically and discipling others to do the same

A devoted follower of Jesus Christ knows how to defeat temptation. A devoted follower of Jesus Christ proclaims a clear gospel. And lastly, and we only have a few moments to develop this, a devoted follower of Jesus Christ mentors others who serve with Him.

“Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.” And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him. ”
(Mark 1:16–20, ESV)

I'm going to develop this more next week, but let me just explain briefly that this wasn't the first time these men had met Jesus. They had likely been “tracking with him” for several months before he issues this call to radical discipleship. Nonetheless, this was a momentous turning point in their lives: “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.”

My friends, that is a summons to be obeyed! It was a call to attach themselves closely with Christ, acknowledge His authority over every sphere of their lives, and to imitate His example!

It was also a call to service—a call to service that would be painful. “I will make you *become* fishers of men!” It would not be an easy life, it would require a fundamental change mind that would be a long process. To set your mind on the things of God and not on yourself anymore is a process and it is costly.

I will make you become *fishers of men!*” That is a summons for evangelism, for witness and it remains the central mission of the church today!

Finally, this radical call to obedience is a call to fellowship. The word “follow” implies fellowship, joint-participation, a side-by-side walking with others. And note Jesus called more than just one man. He calls four in this passage, twelve eventually, to be His disciples, to live and learn in community.

It was not an easy call, but it is an existing call to you and to me still today. It calls for a prompt response and a complete response.

These guys were not pushovers. They were rugged fishermen in a successful, international business. But the magnetic and majestic character of Jesus drew these men to follow Him.

“Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men.” How are you responding to that call today. As Charles Simeon suggests, there are at least three appropriate applications to our lives.

First, examination: who are you following in your heart today? Jesus or Satan? Those are the only two options. If you are following—that is if you are attaching yourself to anyone else, accepting their influence and leadership as primary in your life, and wanting to be like them—if you are following anyone else than Jesus, you are not saved. You are in one of two kingdoms today: the kingdom of God or the kingdom of darkness, of the devil. To enter God's kingdom, you must be repenting of your sin and believing in the gospel of Jesus.

Second, humiliation is an appropriate response to this call. If we are the Lord's today and if we consider all He has done for us including this call to discipleship, then we should be humbled. Humbled as we consider, even among the best of disciples, how little we really love Christ, how little zeal we show for His work. We read accounts of how men will go to great lengths to serve human leaders, to preserve their hold on power and to advance their cause. How much more we, who have been recipients of sovereign mercy, almighty power, and unbounded grace lay down our lives and follow Jesus radically.

Third, thankfulness: What a privilege to follow Jesus Christ today. May our hearts be filled with thankfulness for this unspeakable privilege and calling.

Fourth, imitation: We don't ask men and women to follow us, but we do ask them to “imitate us even as we imitate Christ!” “Follow me as I follow Christ!”

How is the Spirit of the living God calling you to respond to this message from His Word?

- Will you come to Christ this hour in repentant faith and call upon Him to save you, to redeem you from your sin, to rescue you from God's just wrath and punishment? Will you, a sinner, look to the one who has all authority over Satan—the One who came to destroy the works of the devil.
- Will you purpose to defeat temptation this week so you will be a purer vessel for Jesus' sake? Will you strive to be filled with the Word and controlled by the Spirit of God more and more this week?
- Will you faithfully proclaim the gospel to others?
- Will you seek to purposefully live in fellowship with other believers this week, even asking God whom you might intentionally mentor and train to serve with you more in ministry?

Let us seek to change for Jesus' sake this week! Let us strive to be devoted followers of Jesus this week. Let's start this week off of ministry off well.