

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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The Beginning of the Gospel

Mark 1:14-15

1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee,
proclaiming the gospel of God,

1:15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at
hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

1. What is Gospel?

The gospel of Mark starts “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). Today’s part describes the first voice of the message of Jesus Christ. “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe in the gospel.” Since the first gospel teaching was the command to “believe in the gospel”, we can tell how important the Gospel is. Then, what is the gospel?

“Gospel” literally means “Good News.” It was written “godspel” in middle-age-English. In this case “god” is “good”, and “spel” is “spell” in modern English. Therefore, “gospel” means “Good News.” When we say “good news”, there are many kinds of so called “good news,” but “gospel” in the Bible is “the gospel of Jesus Christ.” And, when we say “the gospel of Jesus Christ,” it means two things.

First, “the gospel” is “the words talked by Jesus Christ.” Christ went around all the places of Galilee, Judea with his disciples, and preached. His preaching is quite different from the teaching which the

people used to listen to. They listen to the laws which says “do this, do that,” but Jesus taught them the words of grace and salvation which says, “God loves you, and will save you.” The words spoken by Jesus Christ, the good Lord and Master were not any other thing but “good news.” Since the gospel is what Jesus Christ spoke, therefore the gospel is the “gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Secondly, the “gospel” is “the words talked about Jesus Christ”. The words, that tell us Jesus Christ is the Son of God, Savior for the human beings, are the gospel. There are four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They were trying to faithfully record what Jesus Christ did and spoke. And, at the same time, the Gospels try to proclaim Jesus Christ through the record.

The Gospel of Mark says, “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Mark wrote the Gospel to announce that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. John 20:31 says, “but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” From these words, we realize that Gospels were written to let us know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and lead us to the faith in Christ.

Gospels are the “gospel” in two ways. They deliver us the words of Jesus Christ, and they teach who Jesus Christ is. When we read and study the Bible, we will find that the gospel which Jesus Christ spoke and the gospel which teaches us Jesus Christ are never contradicted. Both are one message of the salvation.

2. When and Where Was Gospel First Spoken?

Mark 1:14 describes when and where this gospel had been spoken out

for the first time. It was after John the Baptist had been arrested, in Galilee. What does this mean to us?

No prophets had not appeared in Judea for hundreds of years after Malachi. The Word of God gives breath to man, but the Word had been vanished for a long time. John the Baptist started to speak right at the time. He wore the fur, as same as the prophet Elijah. People recognized John as the second coming of Elijah, one of the greatest prophets in the Old Testament, and rejoiced his prophecy after the long silence. John the Baptist was very straightforward to speak what is good and what is evil, and kept his way even in front of Herod, the lord of Galilee. People praised the braveness of John, and hoped that he would overcome Herod like Elijah beaten the King Ahab. They expected the Word of God to win the high-handed government.

However, the result was opposite; John was arrested and chained in prison. At last he was even executed. People were disappointed by the facts against their expectation. They would have been questioned the power of God's word , or had a doubt and unbelieving thoughts. If the Word of God had gone with John the Baptist's death, the world was covered by darkness again. Yet, the light of God's word stayed there, because Jesus was there. The Son of God spoke stronger than John the Baptist, and assured the "gospel," the message of the salvation, that John couldn't achieve. Consequently, the light of the Word shined more.

Many of Christian leaders said that there is "a famine of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11) in this generation. They caution that preachers do not speak their message as the Word of God, and preachers listen to it as the Word of God. But, the Word of God still

unchanged to stay here and will be delivered to the end of the earth. Even though people seldom listen to, it still the Word of God. We can have hope because of the Word of God itself.

We sometimes have the “disasters” in our lives. Even in such situations, we shall remember that the Word of God is still spoken. We could be panicked and lost capacity of ears to accept His words or faculty of reasons. Yet God is still giving us His words. God can fire a block of charcoal and shine and warm us by the Word of God.

Mark 1:14 mentioned that Jesus proclaimed the gospel in Galilee at the first time. In Japan, Tokyo has increased population contrary to the local prefectures; it is because people can gain benefits in the capital cities. When the earthquake and floods come, city-area is supported well but the local-area. In Judea, there was the discrimination between localities. Galilee was very far away from Jerusalem, and people looked down enough to forget it.

Moreover, Galilee was discriminated by locality and religious reason; Galilee was called “Galilee of the Gentiles - the people dwelling in darkness.” Their locality was very close to Phoenicia and many of trade routes were opened to communicate gentiles. So the people of Judea thought Galilee was “poisoned” by gentiles and the area was most remote from God.

Jesus chose Galilee as the place of “beginning of the gospel,” because he thought the gospel should be first spoken to the most remote people from God. Jesus is the shepherd who seeks even one lost sheep. Jesus called Zacchaeus by name, regardless of how many people in Jericho hated him, and stayed at his house proclaiming, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” in Luke 19:10. He

is the friend of sinners. Jesus gives His hand to people far away from God the most, suffering the most, and in despair, before the people otherwise.

If you now feel that you are far away from God comparing others, it's totally all right. Now you are listening to gospel. God calls you right now. At the time of disappointment John captured, in Galilee where was very far from Jerusalem Jesus spoke out gospel. In any situation and anywhere, gospel is given to you.

3. What Does Gospel Announce and Require?

Finally, let's look at what gospel announce and require in verse 15. Jesus said "The time has come, The kingdom of God is near" The gospel of Jesus declared "the kingdom of God" has come. This "Kingdom of God" appears at the end of world, in the Kingdom "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain." (Revelation 21:4) It will be "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." (2 Peter 3:13) However, Jesus said that this "Kingdom of God" has already appeared now and soon and we don't need to wait for another ten thousands years.

If we live in a way that is far away from the standard of the "Kingdom of God", it is impossible to get there. No matter how hard we work or train ourselves, it is not possible to reach there. However, Jesus said the Kingdom of God has come to us, not other way around. Moreover, it has come to the people who are struggling from their own sins.

The word "kingdom" of the "Kingdom of God" can be translated into "rule". Jesus uses this world in this way. We are lived by God,

loved by God, and we love God. That is the happiest way of living. But we have forgotten about it, hated the loving rule of God, and lived in our own way. Consequently, we experienced misery, realized the love of God and decided to come back to God. However, we can't believe in the love of God and hesitate to go to God. For those people, Jesus declared the "Kingdom of God" or the rule of God comes to them.

Why was Jesus able to say so? Jesus is the King of God's Kingdom. The King came down to this world and lived in this world as a human being. Having said that, the Kingdom of God came down to this world with the King. Jesus is the King, and he became friends of sinners. However, the Kingdom of God is holy place. There is no sin in the Kingdom of God, and sinners or sinful things can not enter the Kingdom of God. Because it is that, Jesus took our sins, crucified himself on the cross for us, and solved our problems. We can enter the Kingdom of God through the gate, which is Jesus' cross.

We can not see the perfect form of the Kingdom of God now, but we can experience the righteousness, peace, and joy of the kingdom of God if we enter the door of the Kingdom, which came with Jesus and was opened with Jesus' cross. If we believe in Jesus, we accept the Kingdom of God. We can live in the Kingdom of God from now.

After the declaration of the Kingdom, Jesus said, "Repent and believe the good news!" Jesus teaches us that the Kingdom of God is here, now with us. However, it is not the same as earthly things or extension of our daily life. The Kingdom of God is different from this world. In the Kingdom of God, we can not use our way of thinking, our view of life or world. We believe God should be the first, not us.

We make our decisions based on God's Word, not our opinions. We work for God's glory, not our plan's realization. We have to change our mind in order to accept the kingdom of God. Jesus expressed this idea by using "repent." "To repent" is not merely confession of our sins or regret of what we did. It is necessary; however, the goal is living toward the Kingdom of God. We have to turn away from our previous way of living and go to Jesus.

Jesus also said, "Believe the gospel!" The function of the gospel is not only teaching us about the Kingdom of God but also it brings us the Kingdom of God or God's loving rule. The Kingdom of God came to us with the declaration of the gospel. It comes into us through our ears as a shape of the good news, and it influences on our inside, our daily life, and our life.

We can hear the declaration of the Kingdom of God everywhere. Jesus has been telling us "The time has come, the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" through many situations such as reading the Bible alone or with friends, listening the sermon in worship service, and reading the Christian books. Yes, the time has come. What else are you looking for? "Repent and believe the good news!" We shall accept this invitation and answer it.

(Prayer)

Dear God Father, thank you so much for telling us the Good News through varied situations. Your kingdom has come through your Son, Jesus Christ, and he declared the arrival of the Kingdom. Please let us open our mind and accept Jesus' powerful declaration. On this day, lead many people to your Kingdom. In the name of Jesus, Amen.