

Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse – January 18th 2009
Mark 1:14-20 The Gospel of Repentance

Ian began by talking about how we measure time in lengths and sequences, which is *chronos* time. Then there are times when 'time flies' or time seems to stand still, as in November 2003 as Jonny Wilkinson kicked the final goal for England to win the rugby world cup, or when we are with someone special, or when we are creating something with wood, or when we see a stunning sunrise. These moments take on a different quality – this is *kairos* time. These occasions are what we yearn for, something that will take us out of our humdrum existence.

Jesus wants to announce that the *kairos* moment of the world has come in His arrival. This is not just a date in the calendar – 'The kingdom of God is at hand', he announces (This could be a worrying problem for those who believe that 'there probably is no God'). He is not describing a realm, or a planet, or an enterprise, or an adjective to be used, but the great *kairos* moment of all history, when the reign of God is about to erupt in His own person and is brought to bear on the affairs of the earth. The saving sovereignty of God has come: we see exorcisms, miracles and supremely the journey to the crucifixion, and then 'death goes into reverse'. The eternal kingdom breaks into time, and disarms the principalities and powers, serving notice on them, and then ultimately Jesus will come again. In short, the triumph of God in the world.

As soon as John the Baptist is arrested, Jesus recognises the moment to announce the good news of the kingdom of God. Unlike John who waited to receive people to be baptised, Jesus goes out as a wandering preacher in northern Galilee. Just when we think it would be good to follow Jesus, He says 'Repent! And believe the good news!' Why does He spoil a good party with that religious word? Because Jesus is the most honest preacher, and tells it like it is. In announcing the reign of God, He knows no-one really wants it. We are rebels, and don't want Him to be Lord of our affairs, and we slum around in our busyness and anger. Not even Israel then wanted the kingdom of God, as they were awash in religious idolatry.

Jesus' first word is negative – Repent – turn back to God, stop trusting in religious leaders, in military power, and see yourself as an evil person who sometimes does good things, a someone who needs saving. Cf. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, and Paul also preaches that the goodness of God will lead us to repentance. We react against this as we tend to think of people like Ian Paisley ranting at his audience, and we do not want to be classed as offensive or a bigot. But you cannot get into the Kingdom unless you come to terms with yourself. It's like having a life-threatening illness, where you actually need the right diagnosis however hard that is. It is a spiritual gift that helps you to know your sins, in order to live a life of repentance and grace. Then we stop justifying our actions and come broken to commit ourselves to God's grace.

We cannot do evangelism without this word. Jesus is not worried about numbers on seats but about the quality of our discipleship, about the days when it doesn't feel so good to be a Christian. He goes to the little places, to the little people, to the head-cases – He does not come with a whole entourage but goes to the fishermen – not a great start. He finds with them a willingness to renounce all, to pull in the nets, to let go and to journey; a belief that this man has authority. And from this mustard seed has grown a big tree, which must be rooted in real actual conversion, real actual discipleship. We must be willing to acknowledge that we are sinners, to desire to renounce the world the flesh and the devil, and commit to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the community of the Church. Let repentance be a way of life.