

START

The Start is the Hardest Part



The first step can be the most frightening; the start can be the hardest part. We are “maintain” people. We can keep stuff going. But how do we get moving on something different? Maybe God is calling you to start something new—to take a new step in a new direction in the new year. The first chapter of Mark gives us the Gospel version of “Start.” It shows how the Jesus started his ministry. This series will encourage you to give it a try. To start.

START • Mark 1:14-15 • Tim McConnell • January 28, 2018

There's a story told about a young man who got his first job in high school. He tells his friend, "I was out in the woods with my rifle and the owner of the mill saw me and said he'd pay me to shoot the rats infesting his mill. All I have to do is go out there after school with my rifle and I get paid!" His friend asked to come along. So they went. The boy with his rifle and his friend, and they took their spot and sat and watched. Sure enough along come a few rats. The friend says, "There! Look! Shoot them! Shoot them!" But the boy turns and says, "What, and lose my first paying job?" It's easy to forget why we are here. It's easy to forget why we are doing what we are doing. We need a clear message, a clear vision to keep us on track. A good start can come apart without a good vision to keep us on track.

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1) We are looking at the Start Jesus made. When Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth began his ministry, and we began to see something different—Jesus the Son of God our Savior. The start is the hardest part, and there are things God is calling us to start. We know that any good endeavor begins somewhere, with some first step, and then faces ups and downs. So we want to help each other, encourage one another, to follow in Jesus' footsteps and learn how to start like Jesus starts. To walk like Jesus walks. What we see today is that Jesus is very clear about His mission from the very beginning. Jesus places a marker out there, a clear mission statement. It's in verse 15 where Jesus delivers a one-sentence sermon, an entire sermon in one sentence—I know you wish your pastor was that good! One sentence to define a ministry. Here it is: "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15)

Every organization, every effort, needs a mission statement to keep it on track. It is just too easy to drift away from the main thing and lose track of the actual purpose or strength of an organization. That's why mission statements are drawn up. CEO's and business leaders are charged with the responsibility of keeping the company on track with the main mission. Politicians are told to keep on message, don't get distracted by side issues or petty arguments...and they are always so good at it! I'd hate to be a staffer trying to keep a politician on message. In the military they talk about "mission creep." It's when an operation with a clear mission is prone to take up other good ideas or other good challenges alongside the main mission,

and those other ideas take just enough energy and attention and time and resourcing to muddy the main mission. Good ideas guarantee that the main idea, the main goal, is actually missed and the mission fails. So you have to be disciplined to stay on track and keep on mission. You know, this actually even happens in churches from time to time. Let the main thing be the main thing or the start will fall apart.

Here's the main thing for Jesus. "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:15) It's a sermon in four parts. Let's dig into it together. First, (1) The time has come. The time has come, says Jesus. There are two words in New Testament Greek we translate as "time." "Chronos" means chronological time, sixty minutes makes an hour, twenty-four hours makes a day, and time marches on in linear fashion from one moment to the next. But there's another word for time, "kairos." That's the word Jesus uses here, and it means something more than the timer has gone off and it's five o'clock somewhere, or something like that. It means more than linear time. Kairos is about fullness. It's that pregnant moment. That ripening moment. Something is about to happen; something is about to be fulfilled. You've been in these moments. You've had these moments in your life. Time feels different. A minute isn't sixty seconds in these moments—if you know what I mean—time slows down. It's that moment. The moment a musician walks out on stage, the moment a pilot first takes the stick, the moment an astronaut steps off a ladder onto the surface of the moon. The moment a young man bends down on one knee in front of the woman he loves and says, "Will you marry me?" That's the kind of time Jesus is talking about here. It's time. What Jesus is saying at the start of His ministry is just that. The time is now. The Gospel message includes the principle that if someone is hearing the message, then the time is now for that one to accept it. The time is now, the time is fulfilled. If you are hearing the Gospel message, then this is the time that God has ordained for you to hear and to respond. The time is now.

(2) The Kingdom of God has come near. This is a huge statement, a huge claim, and it is at the very center of Jesus' message and ministry from the first day to the last...or we could say even to right now. What does it mean? It means a different way of life is here. A new possibility. The rules and limitations we thought were universal are only a small part of the game, in fact they are passing away. A new kingdom emerges, present in Jesus. The Kingdom of God is where God is the King.

It is where God's ways are the ways, where life is lived as God intends and death and destruction and corrosive hatred and self-centered patterns give way to life, love, joy, peace—life that is truly life. Heaven is near. As pastor Don Everts writes, "To become a Jesus Follower is a giant Believing-and-Acting-on-it step: it is to move in, to receive residency in the Kingdom of God, to defect to a new nation and build a life there." And the benefits are overwhelming, "the Kingdom Dweller" as he calls it has a new citizenship, a new identity—every citizen in the Kingdom of God is named Beloved, Beautiful Saint, Child of God. The Kingdom believer has a new family, a new allegiance—"there is a change in what he or she will and will not salute" Everts says. They have a new King; a new diet, living on the Word of God; a new constitution and bill of rights; a new relationship with the Creator and a new Holy Spirit within; a new perspective on life; a new hope in the future; a new purpose for getting out of bed in the morning. "The Kingdom Dweller has a new record: the regrets and stains and penalties of a painful life of sin are replaced by the cleanness of Jesus' forgiveness...Moving into the Kingdom changes everything! A whole new life—it's almost like being born again." (Jesus with Dirty Feet, p. 57)

All of this is near in Jesus. Jesus says all of this, this entirely new way of life, new way of seeing the universe, new reality—Jesus is saying this reality is the actual reality, this life is the life, this is what is real and lasting and eternal, not the other you've been living—it is all present. It is near. So near, it's like a pregnant moment. Right now. What Jesus meant was himself. Here I am, He is saying. Jesus Himself is the gateway. Jesus is where the Kingdom comes down and where you can enter the Kingdom. In Jesus God's way is the way. He is the crossroads where the point of decision comes; He is the door where one either bows their head and enters in, or walks away to eternal exclusion from the ways of God. In Jesus the Kingdom of God makes a personal appearance.

The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. (3) Repent. Jesus starts His mission and ministry with a clear statement of what it is all about, and the third point is maybe the hardest—repent. Only through repentance can a person participate in the Kingdom of God with joy. To repent means to turn around, to turn from our sinful ways and walk in God's ways. To enter the Kingdom of God is to exit the kingdom of our selves. Stop going the direction you are going. Turn about face. Begin going the opposite direction. It isn't easy, but Jesus says this is very much a part of it. It is more than feeling sorry or regretful in-

side about our mistakes or disappointments, it is more than a lingering feeling of dissatisfaction with life. It is a willingness to hear from the Word of God and name our crimes, to say, "Now I know. I may not have known at all before. But now I know that when I did that thing, when I said that word, when I acted that way I was not just coming up short in my own sight, I was not just hurting someone else, I was committing a crime against God's law. And I'm sorry. I admit my crime and resolve not to repeat it." That's repent.

(4) Believe the good news. Believe the Gospel. This whole mission statement, remember, is Jesus defining and proclaiming the "good news of God," the Gospel. Repent is turning from; believe is turning toward. Believe the good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The ancient world knew this word, "gospel." This was the word for an imperial announcement. When Rome conquered a nation, they would pronounce a gospel from the Roman Emperor—"Hey, good news! You get to be part of Rome!" Of course, their own leaders had all just been killed and dragged through the streets, but hey. Good news. God has good news. God has a Kingdom you can be a part of. God has a reign and rule for you to enter in in Jesus. Jesus says, believe the good news, believe the Gospel of God. Belief is intellectual assent—it is something we do with our minds. Belief is trust—it is something we do with our soul. And belief is obedience—it is something we do with our bodies. The gift of salvation in Jesus Christ is a free gift received by believing. We are saved by grace through faith. There is no point to knowing a gift has been prepared for you and not opening it. There is no point in understanding Jesus has made a bridge to heaven if you don't try it, step on it, put your life on it to prove it. There is no point in standing before the door. Believe. Walk through.

This is the message of Jesus. Keep on message. Keep the main thing the main thing or the start will fall apart. Keep on message and you will get where you are meant to go. Dr. Henry Cloud wrote a book called "9 Things You Simply Must Do to Succeed in Love and Life." I read it. I thought, I'd love to succeed in love and life. That sounds great, doesn't it? Beats the alternative. One of his nine things is "play the movie to the end." If your life is a movie, play the movie out in your mind all the way to the end of it. Keep the end in view, and as you make decisions or make turns play them out to the end. It is amazing how a worthy target out on the horizon can straighten out all the little twists and turns of life. Keep the main thing the main thing. Keep on message, and take the long view. Keep the main thing the main thing and your start won't fall

apart. I climbed Blodgett Peak a few weeks ago. No applause is necessary! I cried for three days about how sore my legs were. But the nice thing about climbing a peak is that the goal is always out there in front of you. As long as you're going up, you're making progress. I mean, there were lots of twists and turns, and lots of places where the trail broke off or disappeared entirely, there were lots of moments when I thought I might be lost and was probably going to die. It's not a very well-marked trail! But the peak is always out in front. Keep going and you can get where you are meant to go.

This is Jesus' message. "'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:15) The time has come. You can't live in the past, can't live in the future, we can only live in the present moment. Now the time is fulfilled, Jesus is present in this moment, today is the day of salvation. The Kingdom of God has drawn near. The barrier between you and God has grown very thin now; Heaven is very near; eternal life is right in front of you; new life is right here. Jesus is the way. In Jesus the Kingdom of God makes a personal appearance. So He says, repent. Turn. Stop the program of self-justification, assessing blame and casting blame on others. Stop the comparison game—well, I'm not so bad. I'm not as bad as that one or this one. Stop all the attempts to defend and justify and make an excuse for where you are and what you've done. Let God's rules apply. Let God's standards come in. See your sin. Confess and repent, and believe the good news. In Jesus Christ your sins have been forgiven. Of all the soil to be turned over, of all the ground that can be won for the Kingdom of God, there is no ground, no soil more important than the soil of your heart. That's how the world changes. One heart becomes Kingdom soil. One eternal soul named for Jesus. Believe the good news, a new life is here, a new possibility is here, a new start. In Jesus.

STUDY GUIDE

START • Mark 1:14-15

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read our passage Mark 1:16-20. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Read it one or two more times.

- What do you notice about our passage? What stands out to you? What questions do you have after reading the passage?
- In our passage, we see these men respond to Jesus without delay. Why do you think they responded as they did?
- How do you tend to procrastinate in your life with Jesus? Why do we put off what God is calling us to start?
- Simon and Andrew leave their nets. James and John leave their father in the boat. If we are going to follow Jesus with urgency what might we have to leave behind?
- What is a word, phrase, or thought from today's passage that God seems to be lifting up as being significant for you? How does it speak to a current situation in your life? How is God inviting you to respond?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

What does Jesus say to Simon and Andrew? What does it mean to fish for people? How are we called to fish for people?

IN: Connect With the Family of God

Pray for us as a church. Pray that we would all follow Jesus with urgency and courageously join the Lord as He calls us to follow Him.