

“THE GOSPEL: What Difference Does It Make?”

A sermon by
The Rev. Dr. Douglas E. Nagel
Sunday, January 13, 2019

TEXTS: Galatians 1:1-10 and Mark 1:1 and Mark 1:12-28



Galatians 1:1-10

Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— and all the members of God’s family who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!

Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Mark 1:1

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Mark 1:12-28

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me and I will make you fish for people.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.



We almost absorb it without thinking about it. Everything that exists has a beginning. Trees do not spring up fully formed. They exist first as a seed, then a sapling, and finally mature into a forest giant. Humans do not spring fully formed from the womb. Once there was a time when they were not. Then, starting with the uniting of sperm and egg, rapid cell division and differentiation lead to a fully-formed human being that will eventually be able to breathe, move, and feed on its own. Everything we know in human experience, except for God, has an origin, a starting point, a beginning.

The Gospel also has a beginning. The Gospel is not merely the name of a book, although we find four Gospels in the New Testament of the Bible. There are not four Gospels. There is only one Gospel. Thus, in the New Testament, we have the one Gospel told by four different people, four different personalities, four different interpretive filters, and related four different ways. We call them the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. However, in the Greek language, each is labeled, *Kata Matthion*, *Kata Markan*, *Kata Lukan*, *Kata Johannein*. The word *kata*, in the Greek, means “according to.”

There is one Gospel, told four ways by four different writers; a Gospel according to Matthew, a Gospel according to Mark, a Gospel according to Luke, and a Gospel according to John.

Verse 1 of Mark starts with these words, *“The beginning of the Gospel of (or about) Jesus Christ.”* Other books of the Bible start with similar words. Genesis 1:1 records, *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”* John 1:1 records, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* 1 John 1:1 records, *“We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—”*

Gospel is good news. The Greek *euangelion* is the declaration of good news, glad tidings. In fact, the verb form used in the angel’s greeting to the shepherds at the birth of Jesus, *“Fear not, for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy for all people. . .”* is the Greek participle *euangolizomai*, literally, *“I am well-messaging you.”*

There is much that is packed into that first short verse. Everything in that first verse points to the fullness of what Mark is about to disclose to his readers and hearers. This is “the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.” We have unpacked the first six words. Let us now unpack the last two.

Jesus’ name is significant.

Names are always important. Often, they reflect what is going on in the culture. Thus, my senior year of college, in a fraternity of 35 guys, there were five ‘Doug’s in the junior and senior class. We were born in

1954 and 1955. The Korean Conflict began in 1950. Active hostilities ceased in July of 1953. General Douglas MacArthur oversaw American troops until he was removed by President Truman in 1951.

I wonder where all those 'Doug's got their names?

When we chose names for our children, we spent a great deal of time and discussion regarding the matter. LuAnn has no middle name. You also cannot get a nickname from LuAnn. So, LuAnn insisted on a name for our daughter that would give her a middle name and several possibilities for a nickname. Our daughter has been Elizabeth, Betsy, Beth, and Betz. Her full name is Elizabeth Faith Nagel and now Aldridge.

Andrew was easy. He was named for the first Nagel to come to this country. That Andrew Nagel emigrated from Darmstadt, Germany to America in 1846. He was a cobbler. In America, he became a farmer. Our son's middle name honors my mom's side of the family. Her Scottish clan is the Ross Clan. Ross Township outside of Pittsburgh is named for our ancestors. Thus, my son is Andrew Ross Nagel.

Mary and Joseph never had the option of coming up with a name for their infant son. Matthew records in his gospel that the angel told Joseph in a dream about what was going on with Mary. Matthew 1:20-21 records, *"But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived within her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.'"*

Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Yeshua or Joshua. Yeshua means "Yahweh saves." Yeshua was a common name in the first century. Joseph and Mary are told to name their son Jesus is because of the role he is to play. He will save his people from their sins. He will be the mediator and sacrifice, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He is not named Jesus by chance or coincidence. He is named Jesus because of what he will do.

In my early years, no one ever explained to me the significance of the word "Christ." Without being sacrilegious, I freely admit that for many years, I assumed that Christ was Jesus's last name, just like my last name was Nagel. Jesus was the son of Mary and Joseph. His last name was Christ, so Mary and Joseph's name must have been Joseph and Mary Christ, too. Right? Wrong!

The word 'Christ' is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word, 'Mashiach' or messiah. The word means "The Anointed One." In Jewish eschatology, the term *mashiach*, or "Messiah", came to refer to a future Jewish king from the Davidic line, who is expected to be anointed with holy anointing oil and rule the Jewish people during the Messianic Age.

So, if we go back to that first verse in Mark, we discover that it could really be translated this way: "The beginning of the good news about Jesus, the Anointed One of God, who will save his people from their sins."

Dr. D. James Kennedy, former pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida writes the following, "The Gospel is the greatest story ever told, about the greatest offer ever made, by the greatest person who ever lived."

Mark would not disagree. However, when he begins his gospel, Mark says that it begins with John the Baptist, not Jesus. Mark quotes the prophet Isaiah, saying, *"As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you. . .'"*

In nineteenth century America, the circus never came to town unannounced. Three to four months before the circus would arrive in a water stop by train, a “drummer” would come to town. He was the advance man. Equipped with a roll of full-color broadsides, a brush, and a bucket of wallpaper paste, he would plaster up posters of elephants, giraffes, juggling clowns, lions, and of course, the Big Top. He would fast-talk his way into bars, saloons, and local shops dropping off a few tickets to the circus here and there to make sure that at least one member of the family would show up when the circus came to town. If one person held a ticket, it was almost guaranteed that the rest of the family would find themselves seated in the grandstands on opening night.

Before that ever happened, the circus would parade the entire circus caravan with all the performers through the streets of the town, making sure that everyone got a foretaste of what was to come and the type of show to be found under that vast expanse of canvas at the edge of town.

John was not the main event. He knew that. He had a role. His job was to announce the One to come. The Messiah was revealed when Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized.

Following his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus began to gather disciples. Mark tells us that Jesus’ first act of ministry takes place in the synagogue in Capernaum. Luke does the same. For Matthew, it is diverse ministries of healing. John declares that Jesus’ first miracle takes place at a wedding in Cana of Galilee.

What is most important to note is that with the coming of Jesus, something significant has happened. Jesus comes declaring the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Mark records Jesus beginning his Galilean ministry with the declaration, *“The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15)*

What is that good news?

The Good News includes the coming of the Kingdom of God. A clue can be found in Luke. This is what Jesus declared in his home synagogue in Nazareth, before he began his ministry, when he rose to read the prophet Isaiah, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.”*

The news would be good for those who were poor. The news would be good to those who were held captive, whether physically, emotionally, psychologically, or relationally. The news would give sight to the blind, both the physically blind and those who lived in spiritual darkness. It would be good news for those who lived under oppression, whether it was the oppression of Rome, or the oppression of the evil one. Jesus declared a new day of God’s active intervention in the lives of all people. It would lead to their salvation and freedom from bondage and death.

This is what Jesus preached. However, Jesus didn’t stop there. His miracles backed up his teaching.

Much later, the author of 1 John would write in 1 John 3:8b, *“The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”*

Thus, the good news was also about Jesus, the Son of God. Nowhere is there a better demonstration of this than Jesus’ first healing in Mark. It is the Sabbath. Jesus is in the synagogue in Capernaum, the largest town near Nazareth on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He is invited to read, indicating that he has already established a reputation in the area. He reads the Scriptures and comments on them. He doesn’t cite what all

the famous rabbis have said about the passage like the scribes do. Instead, he comments. He tells them what the words mean. He expresses what God's intent is in that passage of Scripture. He teaches them as one who has authority.

Suddenly, a man cries out. "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

Notice what happens. Jesus is teaching. The demonic presence takes attention away from Jesus, away from the word of God, and focuses all attention on itself. Notice also, that the demonic presence knows who Jesus is and why he has come. James, the half-brother of Jesus writes in James 2:19, *"You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe---and shudder."*

The enemy knows who Jesus is. The enemy knows that Jesus has come to stake his claim over the territory he stole by persuading the first man and woman to give up their dominion, authority, and birthright by giving into temptation and disobeying God in the Garden. Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil.

He does. Right here. Right now.

He silences the demonic presence. Then Jesus commands him to leave the man. The man convulses. The demonic presence screams. The man is restored.

What difference does the Gospel make? Ask the man who lived under the oppression of this demonic presence. Ask him what he thought of his new freedom. Likely, this man was known to those who gathered in the synagogue that day. People avoided him, steered clear of him, talked about him behind his back, and drew their children closer to themselves when he was around.

He was alone.

After his encounter with Jesus, this man's life was radically changed. He became known locally as "the man whom Jesus healed." He had a new story to tell.

What difference does the Gospel make? Perhaps in a very simplistic way, this episode in the synagogue in Capernaum is the answer. It is having a new story to tell because of Jesus. It is having a new direction to life because of Jesus. It is experiencing Jesus as healer and friend. It is an encounter with Jesus that begins to fundamentally change us and redirect our lives toward the vision of a Kingdom of justice, love, peace, and reconciliation where God rules supreme in our lives and God's word dwells richly in our hearts.

The good news is that because of Jesus, our lives can change, and our stories can have a new and better ending than we ever thought possible.

And that is good news, indeed!

Soli Deo Gloria! To God alone be the glory. Amen.