

## **200112 – Sun AM/MRCC**

**"Close Encounters" ... Mark 1.0, a series through Mark's gospel**

(Mark 1:1-15; Psalm 139:16; Gen 32:28; Matt 7:22-23; 1 Tim 6:9-10; Gal 5:22-23; et al)

**PROPOSITION:** God wants to give you His leadership because it will set you free.

### **INTRO:**

#### **1. There are moments that change everything that follows ...**

**ILLUS/HUMOR:** You get your license or first car – the world is different now. [or maybe phone – sociologists tell us that the next generation sees a smartphone as more important/significant than a car.] Or you notice girls [boys] for the first time, and suddenly that kid you've been playing 4-square with at recess is ... A GIRL! 8-)

Or when you become a parent [Isaiah!] ... or you lose a child and realize that there are realities in this life that are much greater than your plans ... or you visit/live-in another country or culture and realize that people can see things very differently than you do ...

Some moments change everything and you're never the same again afterwards – like that moment when your team is about to win their second straight Super Bowl because you're on the 1-yd line and you have Marshawn Lynch and then ... ;-)

2. But seriously – there are moments that change everything; **[one SLIDE w/all four people] Copernicus** demonstrates that the earth revolves around the sun, not the other way around ... **Pythagoras** proves the earth round, not flat ... **Einstein** proves that time and space are relative ... **Max Planck** proves that quantum dynamics are real.

These moments change everything that follows because they reveal something about the world we never knew, which changes how we think and feel about everything else ...

**ILLUS:** An iconic scene from "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" when an ordinary guy discovers there's more to everything than he thought ... **[FILM CLIP – Dreyfus, train tracks]**

After this moment, nothing is the same for this man. His world has changed.

**ILLUS:** The way I think about UFO's was changed when my grandfather told me his story ... but not so much as when I discovered that God has made Himself known in Jesus\*\*\* ...

3. This morning we begin a journey together through Mark's gospel, which was written to tell the story of how God reveals Himself through this man Jesus.

The Bible says, **"The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory."** (John 1:14) The Bible says, **"In the past God spoke to our forefathers at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken by his Son."** (Heb 1:1) The Bible says, **"He is the image of the invisible God,"** (Col 1:15) ... [ONE SLIDE, 3 verses fading in] ... and Jesus Himself said, **"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."** (Jn 14:9)

### **TRANSITION:**

As we watch Jesus together, we will be transformed by Him. Let's do that this year ... (turn to Mark 1) ... [the word of God is living and active ... Heb 4]

## **I. GOOD NEWS, A BIG PLAN, PEOPLE WHO PREPARE**

### **1. *The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)***

NOTE – Mark’s gospel is short, sweet, fast-moving and full of action. Most scholars believe it was written as a missionary book for non-Jews. It gets right to the point, the same way you would if you had a ‘close encounter’ ...

And right from the start, Mark uses the word “gospel” which means “good news”. We’ve often reduced the word “gospel” to a technical religious term, but it isn’t. It means “something you would be so excited to tell that you couldn’t hold back” ...

**ILLUS/HUMOR:** “free tacos” ... or better yet, the feeling I had when Rhonda said “yes” to my marriage proposal – I wanted to tell people! Q: Why? A: This changes everything!

### **2. It is written in Isaiah the prophet: *I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way – a voice of one calling in the desert, “Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.” (Mark 1:2-3)***

It’s important to understand that the coming of Jesus wasn’t an accident or an impulse or even a surprise to those who were paying attention. It was something God had promised over and over because He is working from a script (so to speak) ...

a) **In your life and mine, God is working out a plan.** The Bible emphasizes this over and over in many different ways (Rom 8:28, Heb 11:39-40, et al). **There is a plan in your life** – the Psalmist writes, *“Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Psalm 139:16)*

**ILLUS:** When I look back on my time in USMC boot camp, lots of things make sense now that didn’t then. There was a plan to change me. It worked.

b) NOTE – this plan involves “preparation” by “making straight paths”. The idea is simple – you will perceive more of what God is doing if you “straighten” your life. Righteousness increases your experience of God.

**ILLUS:** C.S. Lewis on washing windows – the sun is always there, but you see more when the windows are clean. Sin blinds/deafens/numbs you.

c) NOTE – “*I will send my messenger*” ... God seeks to use godly people in your life to help you straighten things out. Pay attention to them. No tool in God’s hands is more precise and potent than godly people ...

### **3. *And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message: “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:4-8)***

There's a couple important things to learn here:

a) FIRST - **repentance = changing your mind** ... it's not a ritual you do, like knocking on wood or clearing your ears in an airplane – it's when you say simply, "God, you're right and I'm wrong," about something.

**That's what God seeks in your life.**

**ILLUS/HUMOR:** Rhonda and I have been married for 35 years, but she still makes the bed wrong on her side. She just won't listen. 😊

**ILLUS:** But seriously, God helps you most when you let Him change your mind. Have you let Him change your mind about lying, or judging, or 1-day-in-7, or how to handle your money, or loving your enemies, or honoring your parents?

b) SECOND – **any person who is truly sent from God into your life will point you beyond themselves.** They will not be your guru; instead they will insist that you focus on Jesus, and not them. *"After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie."* (Mark 1:7)

1) this is the test of a good pastor ...

2) this is the goal you should have on other peoples' lives ...

3) **ILLUS:** Christ-followers reject the cults of celebrity which are everywhere in our world. [cf 1 Cor 3:1-9] Sometimes, like when I just did this heart-attack thing, people will say, "Oh, Pastor Greg, we can't get along without you." STOP IT! God wants you to grow beyond that; be devoted to Him and His church, not any one person or personality ...

4) John himself said it this way; "He must increase; I must decrease."

(John 3:30) **ILLUS:** C.S. Lewis has had an enormous influence on my life, but I do not follow C.S. Lewis, I follow Jesus. So must you.

c) THIRD AND FINALLY – the signs that God sends into your life and mine are not an end in themselves. They are given to point you to Jesus. Lots of people think that miracles or supernatural experiences are what we should seek. Nonsense. Jesus Himself warned, **Many will say to me on that day** [of judgment] **"Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out many demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"** (Matt 7:22-23)

Miracles are real, but they're not the point. Jesus is. Listen to Him.

**ILLUS:** When I worked in the E.R. there were lots of signs sometimes – people bleeding, crying, screaming, or even dying. But I learned that all of those things are real but my job is to listen to the doctor so I can help. So it is with us ...

## TRANSITION:

Then immediately Mark's gospel skips ahead to Jesus, and we learn two things right away – the first is that **God calls us into struggle, not out of it.** And second, that **listening to Jesus is how we find real freedom** in a world that wants to enslave us ...

## II. THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

1. *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased."*

*At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him. (Mark 1:9-12)*

2. There's a potential for misunderstanding here that we want to dodge – it would be tempting to think the voice is there to tell Jesus something He doesn't already know, but what would be a mistake:

a) boy Jesus in the temple – Lk 2:41-52, esp.v.49, *"Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49)*

b) another audible voice in Jn 12:30 – *"This voice was for your benefit, not mine." (Jn 12:30)*

c) So the point of the miracle was to point us (beyond itself) to Jesus ... again = listening to Him is more significant than anything miraculous; in fact it is the point of the miraculous ...

3. But notice what happens next – it is finally time for Jesus' public ministry to begin (God has a timing in all of our lives\*) and God begins it (surprisingly!) by leading Jesus into the desert to confront the Devil – cf Matt 4:1 explicitly *"to be tempted by the Devil"*.

According to the assumptions that many make, God doesn't do this sort of thing. But obviously, He does. Q: Why? A: Because dealing with temptation is the first step to being used by God ...

a) **ILLUS:** If I can go back to the E.R. for a moment – there's a cool kind of joy in tangibly helping injured/sick/hurting people. But one of the first lessons I learned is that I can't be helpful if I can't control myself emotionally ... [ambulance freak-out]

So it is with you and me.

If my emotions are a problem, there are two options – I can be removed from the E.R. so I don't cause problems, or I can learn to overcome them. God wants to use you and me, but self-control is necessary.

***"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control." (Gal 5:22-23)*** Now you can feel sorry for yourself and say, "I can't do it," but that's a dead-end. It means you will be sidelined and never know the joy of obedience [**ILLUS:** one tree in the garden w/no access so we can learn the joy of obedience]

b) So God wants you to discover the joy of overcoming temptation because it sets you free to believe you can be part of His mission.

4. Lots of people think that the struggle against sin is a sign that we are falling away from God. Actually, it's the sign we're getting closer to Him. In fact, it's the sign that we are His.

**ILLUS:** Jacob wrestles ... Then the man said, ***"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God."*** (Gen 32:28)

Your struggle against sin is not your shame, it is your glory.

Our world says that you should give in to your sinfulness because your appetites tell you who you are. God says it is your struggle against your worst appetites that tells you who you are.

**QUOTE:** "God is easy to please, but hard to satisfy." (George MacDonald). **Q: Why? A: Because He is a Father ... EXHORT** - Fellas, get up and fight pornography! Ladies, get up and fight your tongue, your bitterness, and your tendency to feel sorry for yourselves. Fellas, take a stand against your temper and your fear. When you do, you please your Father!

**TRANSITION:** And then, having owned the struggle, Jesus gets down to business ...

### **III. THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM**

1. ***After John was put in prison, [timing] Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:14-15)*** The invitation is twofold:

a) REPENT = change your mind and agree with God ... (we talked about this)

b) THE KINGDOM IS NEAR = you can begin to experience God's leadership in your life, instead of the leadership of the Devil and a wicked world ...

c) Many think of the Christian faith as a way to get what they want – a certain kind of family, or a certain kind of success on earth, or a certain kind of feeling. But the gospel isn't designed to help me get what I want, it's designed to help me want what God gives ...

2. You see, church, the problem is that our wants/desires are disordered.

**ILLUS:** A heroin addict craves heroin, but getting it isn't freedom. A man with a bad temper wants to vent his road rage, but venting it isn't freedom. The gospel is God inviting you (in Jesus) to discover the freedom of wanting the right things ...

**ILLUS:** Once upon a time, I wanted to be rich(er). I thought it would make me free. But as I have gone through life, I've learned it doesn't work that way. God says, ***"People who want to get rich fall into temptations and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."*** (1 Tim 6:9-10) So my wants have changed. They started changing when I chose to want what Jesus was offering. **Q:** Have you?

3. **God wants you to want what He's giving** – and what He's giving begins with making Him king of your life. (It's not much different from what you want for your kids ... ) The good news is that God's leadership is available to you, if you will only listen to this man Jesus and let Him lead you.

He will change your desires.

**ILLUS:** me and horror movies ...

#### **INVITATION**

To let God change your desires ...