



# DAY ONE OF THE REVOLUTION

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Mark 1:14-34

Fourth Message

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Eighty years ago this week,<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Ilyich Lenin launched the October Revolution in Russia. In April of the same year, one of Lenin's comrades, Anatoly Lunacharsky, caught Lenin by the train tracks in Zurich as he was about to embark on a sealed train through Germany, back to Russia. Lunacharsky wrote: "In leaving, Lenin was composed and happy. When I looked at him, smiling on the platform of the departing train, I felt that he was filled with some such thought: 'finally, finally, that has arrived for which I was born, for which I was prepared, for which I prepared the entire party, without which our whole life would be merely preparatory and unfinished.'"<sup>2</sup>

The October Revolution was about to unfold. But, eighty years later, where is Lenin's statue? And what has happened to his revolution?

In our text this morning from the gospel of Mark we find Jesus launching his Messianic revolution. This is an event of unprecedented scale. Jesus has daring plans to reconstruct an entire nation, and go on from there to launch campaigns throughout the world. As we come to this text, questions fill the air. Where will Jesus go? What will he do? Who will join him? What kind of opposition will he face? Will he succeed? By the end of day one Mark will say that Jesus has enlisted his first disciples, secretly invaded enemy territory, subdued the opposition, and safely secured his first beachhead. By day's end, all of Israel is flocking to this new beachhead.

How did Jesus accomplish all of this? Let's see what Mark says.

## Introduction to the Revolution (1:14-15)

**And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel"** (NASB).

Mark records that Jesus took up his public ministry after John the Baptist had been imprisoned by Herod. John's message was radical and revolutionary. It was as dangerous as it was popular. Josephus says of him in his history: "Now, as many flocked to him, for they were greatly moved by hearing his word, Herod, fearing that the great influence John had over the people might lead to some rebellion, thought it far best, by putting him to death to prevent any mischief he might cause."<sup>3</sup> But, as other despots have painfully discovered throughout history, you can imprison the messenger, but not the message. John is imprisoned, but his message continues unabated in Jesus, the one whom John came to anoint.

Surprisingly, Jesus takes his message not to Jerusalem, where the air was ramrod stiff with tradition and opposition, but to Galilee by the sea, where the air is fresh and the lungs can breathe deeply. This is still true today. Galilee, a freshwater lake, is fed by the snows of Mt. Hermon. The lake, which is 700 feet below sea level, empties into the Jordan, which in turn flows to the Dead Sea, another 600 feet lower. In Jesus' day, ten major cities surrounded Galilee. The 300 commercial fishing boats that fished the lake supplied fish to much of the Roman Empire. So here on the shores of Galilee Jesus takes up John's message. And he comes with the same razor sharp message, "The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." God's rule was breaking in upon the nation of Israel. It was the dawn of a new age, and the world would never be the same again.

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## I. The Calling of Fishermen by the Sea (1:16-20)

**And as He was going along by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew, the brother of Simon, casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And they immediately left the nets and followed Him. And going on a little farther, He saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who were also in the boat mending the nets. And immediately He called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went away to follow Him.**

### A. The call of the fishermen

In Mark's rapidly moving, vivid style, Jesus is walking by the sea of Galilee, by the town of Capernaum. Observing two fishermen casting their nets into the water, he calls them to follow him, saying he will make them "fishers of men." Jesus steps right into their world and summons them not to a system, but to himself. These men had had enough of the rabbinical system. It is important to remember that this was not the first time they had seen Jesus. Matthew records that Jesus left Nazareth, probably when his father Joseph died, and came with his mother and sisters to settle in Capernaum (Matt 4:12-13; Mark 6:3). Also, it is quite possible that James and John were cousins to Jesus. They were related to him through their mother Salome, whom John suggests was sister to Mary (John 19:25).<sup>4</sup>

### B. The leaving of occupations and family

So strong is the summons of Jesus and so irresistible his power that these fishermen are immediately moved to leave everything for the kingdom. Their response is immediate, decisive, substantive, and radical. In the first case, they leave their nets (their occupation); in the second, their strong family ties, and the economic impact which that

would entail in their family fishing business.

Why did Jesus call fishermen? And what was about his summons to them to be “fishers of men” that irresistibly drew them to leave all and follow him?

### **C. The significance of a fisherman**

The image of a fisherman fishing for men was used by the prophets (Jer 16:16; Amos 4:2; Hab 1:14-17) as a symbol of judgment, of God sending gentile rulers to sinful Israel in a relentless search for men, dragging them out of the sea with a net, symbolic of their death. But Ezekiel changes the metaphor and gives it a new meaning in the Messianic Age. He receives a vision of living waters coming out of God’s new temple into the desert and sea, causing the new waters to teem with fish. God would send fishermen along the waters, from Engedi to Eneglaim, and “there will be a place for the spreading of nets” (Ezek 47:1-12); they would catch many fish according to their kinds. So Jesus’ call to these fishermen in Galilee announces that that age has now dawned; and the place is teeming with fish according to every nation.

What is the lesson here? Jesus calls us to become part of something much bigger than ourselves. That call first came to me when I was in college. During my sophomore year, I asked my college pastor to teach a Bible study in my fraternity. He said, “No. I’m going to teach you and you will teach it.” The thrill of becoming a “fisher of men” filled my heart. Four men came to Christ that first year. After experiencing that wonder it was not difficult to leave my “nets” and change my course of study from stockbroker to pastor, and then to leave strong family ties of financial support to become a fisher of men. Lately we have been emphasizing how important community is in the church and encouraging all of you to get connected in a home fellowship. Home fellowships are wonderful, safe harbors, but let me encourage you that there is nothing like planting a beachhead in enemy territory. So start one! No training is required.

So the first requirement for revolution is disciples. Without them revolution is impossible.

Now that he has his first four disciples, Jesus launches his opening ministry offensive in the synagogue of Capernaum, on the Sabbath.

## **II. Teaching in the Synagogue on the Sabbath (1:21-28)**

### **A. Teaching with a new authority (1:21-22)**

**And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. And they were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.**

The synagogue (the word means “to gather together”) was where the Jews gathered to study the Torah and pray. The institution of the synagogue began with the destruction of the Temple during Israel’s exile in Babylon. Wherever ten Jews were gathered, they could have a synagogue. The institution did not have regular, paid teachers. A lay person ran the place and called on whomever he wished to speak. The normal procedure involved a reading of the Law, accompanied by a parallel reading from the Prophets. Then the ruler of the synagogue called on

someone, oftentimes a visiting rabbi, to comment on the text. Jesus had a reputation as a man with a message, so he was invited to speak. That day, they got more than they bargained for!

That was because Jesus taught with “authority.” He was not like the scribes. When the rabbis taught, their message sounded like our modern legal system. Our courts are dense with layers of precedents and a myriad of human interpretations, which make it difficult to get to the heart of justice. The rabbis quoted the oral tradition, with one rabbi quoting another and another and another, clear back to Moses, until the issue was blurred and buried. It was difficult for any lay person to think his way through the quagmire. Into that scene now comes Jesus, but he fails to quote even one rabbi. Amazingly, he starts with the text, centers it in himself, and then summons his listeners for an immediate response. The people were astonished by his authority.

But then, even more amazing, his authority in word is matched by authority in deed.

### **B. Casting out demons with authority (1:23-28)**

**And just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, “What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” And Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” And throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice, and came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” And immediately the news about Him went out everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.**

As Jesus’ teaching was a rebuke to the dull, lifeless teaching of the rabbis, so his deeds were a rebuke to the claim of their religion to be able to deal with evil. The fact that there was so much demon possession in Jesus’ day is a revealing commentary on the impotence of Judaism. There was much religion, but no power. Religion was a well rehearsed game. But when Jesus enters the synagogue, fully endowed with the Spirit of God, immediately a confrontation with evil takes place. The demons know who he is, and right away they are threatened, because they were aware of his victory over their arch ruler, Satan, in the desert.

First, Jesus muzzles the demon. Then, with but a word, the demon is thrown out. Everyone witnesses his convulsions, his fierce resistance and struggle, then the loud cry, signalling his defeat. In a moment, the battle is over. Never before had anyone been to a service like this. This incident gave rise to the first debate about Jesus concerning this “new teaching, new authority, that even demons obey.” The news spread around Galilee like wildfire. By the end of day one of his ministry, Jesus has set aside the old order of the synagogue.

Next, Jesus leaves the synagogue and enters Peter’s house, located directly in front of the synagogue, facing the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

## **III. At Home on the Sabbath (1:29-34)**

### A. Healing Peter's mother-in-law (1:29-31)

**And immediately after they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was lying sick with a fever; and immediately they spoke to Him about her. And He came to her and raised her up, taking her by the hand, and the fever left her, and she waited on them.**

The foundations of Peter's house can still be seen in Capernaum today, right in front of the synagogue. When the men enter the home, Peter, aware now of the authority that Jesus commands, *immediately* (the word is used eleven times in chapter 1) speaks to him about his mother-in-law who is lying sick with a fever. All it takes is one touch from Jesus ("touch" is a very important word in the gospel of Mark), and the woman is raised up. The fever leaves her and immediately she takes on the role of a servant to wait on them.

### B. Healing and casting out demons (1:32-34)

**And when evening had come, after the sun had set, they began bringing to Him all who were ill and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city had gathered at the door. And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.**

When word is spread about the authority which Jesus displayed in the synagogue, people start arriving, bringing their sick and their demon-possessed friends. Mark says the whole city "gathered" (the verb comes from the same root as the word "synagogue") by the door. Peter's house has become the new synagogue. And, unlike the building next door, his home is filled life and healing. All of Israel is coming to its doors. The house, which was an octagonal structure, was built with several different foundations. In order to accommodate all the people who were coming, they had to keep knocking down the walls and enlarge the home.

When I was at Stanford University, there was a lot of debate among the religious groups on campus about how much space they needed for their ministries. I told them I didn't want any space. I had a friend who was going to buy a house on campus where we would hold our fellowship meetings. When this man bought the house, he told me he had a contractor waiting at the site who was ready to knock down walls so we could have more room for our Bible studies. I asked the contractor to give us ten more feet of space for the eighty students who came every Tuesday evening for Bible study. Every week, two students volunteered to cook dinner for anyone who was hungry. For three years, that house became our synagogue for healing, life and love.

Here in Capernaum, on the Sabbath day, we are privileged to see the unceasing work of God in Jesus, healing, calling, teaching, cleansing and welcoming all. By the end of day one, how far this revolution has progressed! Jesus has enlisted his key disciples; he has invaded enemy territory; he has confronted the enemy and overpowered him; he has set aside the old order and established a base of operations for the new, where all Israel gathers for healing and life.

## IV. Blueprint for Revolution

### A. Will you gather a team of commandos?

In the New Testament, there are no one-man ministries. Revolution is not possible without a team of disciples. When you gather a group around you, these become the deepest, most authentic relationships of your life. All the successful revolutions in the kingdom of God have been accomplished by disciples preaching the same truth. As pastors, we never travel alone. We take others with us to share in the ministry of preaching the truth.

### B. Will you confront the old order?

Once Jesus has a team, he launches his ministry in the most natural place, the synagogue, where the Jews gathered. But where is the synagogue today? It is any place where people gather, where you are not in control to set the stage and you must be invited to speak. It is in board meetings at work, the classroom at school, in your family gatherings, and sometimes in the church. Being a disciple involves learning to confront, challenge and summon wherever God has placed you. Our job is not to make Christian ghettos, but to confront the world on its own turf.

How do we do that? Notice in the confrontation with evil, Jesus did not use the world's methods. He was not rude or abrasive, and he was invited to speak. Evangelism in the early church was always done appropriately. Though the message was offensive, the methods were not.

Thirdly, notice that after the confrontation, Jesus did not manipulate the response. We shouldn't, either! Let us share the words of Jesus and display his healing life, that's all. Don't lobby for results or manipulate for control. Just go home, but keep the door open!

### C. Will you build the new order?

When the Sabbath is officially over, the real ministry begins. My motto in ministry is: "Life begins when the meeting is over." Notice that it happens in the home, not the synagogue. In Mark's gospel, everything that is supposed to happen in the synagogue and the Temple—healing, teaching, cleansing, discipling—occurs in the home. The home is the new synagogue, the center of hospitality. It is the gathering place for strangers and foreigners, the shelter for outcasts and orphans. Notice how important women were in setting the stage for the healing life of Jesus. If Peter's mother-in-law was not made well to serve, how could they open the doors and invite everyone in? That intimate setting of the home can never be replaced by mass meetings. Don't get caught up in so many meetings that you lose the ministry of your home.

One more thing was needed, and that was a cry which would drive this revolution. Every revolution has a battle cry. Lenin's was, "Long live the revolution of workers, soldiers and peasants!" What was Jesus' battle cry?

### D. Will you take up the battle cry?

Mark skillfully unites his text with one word which he uses four times. It is the Greek word *aphiemi*, which is translated "leave" or "release." The term is found in Egyptian papyri for the "release" of the water from sluices or canals for the purpose of irrigation. Jeremiah uses the word in Lamentations 3:46 as a metaphor for the water channels of the eyes. It was used for the *release* of a prison-

er once his debts were paid in full. It was used to announce the Year of Jubilee: "You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a *release* through the land to all its inhabitants" (Lev 25:10). And it was used to announce the coming Messianic Age, when One would come who would proclaim *liberty* to captives and freedom to prisoners (Isa 61:1).

Now Jesus comes, and what happens? Four times in the text we hear this term. Each time the beat of the drum is a little louder and more forceful: freedom, freedom, freedom, freedom! People are set free from occupations; they *leave* their nets. They are set free from family obligations; they *leave* their father in the boat. They are set free from sickness; the fever *left* Peter's mother-in-law. And they are set free from demons, which are *not permitted* to speak. The climax to all this comes in Mark 2:5, when Jesus says to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven [released]." This is the Christian battle cry everywhere we go. We can offer this wonderful gift of freedom to every lonely face we encounter. It is the powerful force which has kept the revolution alive for two thousand years. Will you join?

Do you hear the people sing,  
Lost in the valley of the night?  
It is the music of a people,  
Who are climbing to the light.

For the wretched of the earth,  
There is a flame that never dies.  
Even the darkest night will end,  
And the sun will rise.

They will live again in freedom,  
In the garden of the Lord,  
They will walk behind the plowshare,  
They will put away the sword,

The chain will be broken,  
And all then will have their reward.

Will you join in our crusade?  
Who will be strong and stand with me?  
Somewhere beyond the barricade,  
Is there a world you long to see,

Do you hear the people sing,  
Say do you hear the distant drums;  
It is the future that they bring,  
When tomorrow comes.

### *Les Miserables*

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1. Using an older version of the calendar, it was called the October Revolution.
2. Sidney Alexander, *Intimate Biography of Marc Chagall* (New York: Paragon House, 1978) 184.
3. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.118.
4. John Wehnam works this out in his book, *The Easter Enigma*. Mark calls her "Salome" (15:40); John, "his mother's sister" (19:25); and Matthew "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (27:56).