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A Life According to and for God's New Testament Economy

Many Christians do not realize that the Gospel of Mark gives us a biography of a life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. The New Testament economy of God is for God to dispense Himself into His chosen people to make them sons of God and members of Christ for the formation of the Body of Christ to express the Triune God. This is a simple definition of the wonderful matter of God's New Testament economy.

In order to have a proper understanding of God's New Testament economy, we need the entire New Testament. The Gospel of Mark by itself is not sufficient for this. As we have pointed out, in the Epistles we have the explanation and definition of the life presented in Mark. Therefore, in the light revealed in the Epistles we can see that the life recorded in the Gospel of Mark is a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

The simplicity of the Gospel of Mark

When I was young, Mark was not as precious to me as Matthew, John, and Luke were. My impression of the Gospel of Mark was that it was too simple. Matthew, on the contrary, presents wonderful teachings and parables concerning the kingdom of the heavens. I spent much time to study the Gospel of Matthew, and, as early as 1939, I put out a series of messages on the kingdom of the heavens based on the Lord's teaching in chapters five, six, seven, thirteen, twenty-four, and twenty-five. I have also given many messages on the Gospel of John. Although I have not given as many messages on Luke as on Matthew and John, in the book entitled Gospel Outlines there are a good number of outlines of subjects taken from the Gospel of Luke. Those outlines are based on the different gospel stories and parables in Luke.

In the past, I appreciated Matthew, John, and Luke, but I did not have nearly as much appreciation for Mark. It seemed to me that this Gospel could be compared to a cup of plain water that had no particular color or flavor. However, recently, while I was preparing the Life-study Messages on Mark, the light began to shine from this Gospel. Now I see that in the Gospel of Mark we have a record of a life that is absolutely according to and for God's New Testament economy.

I believe that the Gospel of Mark is the most simple book in the New Testament. But the simplicity of Mark is very striking, and we need to consider it. We need to ask why the Gospel of Mark was written in such a simple way. We need to ask why, apparently, this Gospel has no particular taste or color. I can testify that this kind of questioning opened the door for the light to shine in. The simplicity of the Gospel of Mark is very meaningful.

The more we read the Gospel of Mark, the more we are impressed with its simplicity. Compared to Mark, the Gospel of Matthew is quite complicated. Consider how many names are included in the first sixteen verses of Matthew. Mark, however,

begins in a very simple way: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1).

Like Matthew, the Gospel of Luke is also rather complicated. Consider, for example, the lengthy account of the conception and birth of John the Baptist and the conception and birth of the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, Luke 1 includes the praises of Mary, Elizabeth, and Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist. Then in chapter three Luke presents a genealogy that is more complicated than that found in Matthew. Matthew speaks only of forty-two generations, but in Luke we have seventy-seven generations. To be sure, whereas Mark is simple, Luke is complicated.

In the Gospel of John we have many deep mysteries. John's Gospel opens in a mysterious way: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). We are told that in Him was life (1:4), and then that the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us (v. 14). The Gospel of John, therefore, has a distinct color and flavor. When we read the Gospel of John, we can taste the flavor of this Gospel. But what kind of flavor do you taste when you read the Gospel of Mark? It seems that the only taste in Mark is the taste of plain water.

The beginning of the gospel and the termination of the old things

We have seen that Mark opens with a word concerning the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In 1:4-8 John the Baptist preached the baptism of repentance and also introduced the Slave-Savior. Then in 1:9 we are told that "Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John." After the Lord Jesus was baptized, He was anointed by the Spirit. Then He began His ministry. As we have pointed out, with the Lord Jesus life, work, and ministry were all one. With Him there was no distinction between life and work.

As we have seen, the word "beginning" in 1:1 implies a new start, and this new start involves the termination of the old things. In previous messages we have listed ten items of these old things: culture, religion, ethics, morality, improvement of character, human philosophy, and trying to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. All these things were in existence when John the Baptist came forth to preach the baptism of repentance. In Mark 1 these things were terminated. By what were the old things terminated? They were terminated by the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Furthermore, these old things were buried when the Lord Jesus was baptized.

When the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea, Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt were buried. We may say that the children of Israel brought Pharaoh and his armies with them into the sea. In a similar way, when the Lord Jesus stepped into the waters of baptism, He brought with Him all ten items of the old things. Hence, these old things were terminated and buried.

Living in the kingdom of God

The life the Lord Jesus lived was not a life according to culture or religion. It was not even according to ethics, morality,

philosophy, or improvement of character. The Lord Jesus did not live a life of trying to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. Instead of living according to these ten items, He lived a life that was fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

We need to be deeply impressed with the matter of a life fully according to and for God's New Testament economy. If we are impressed with this thought and expression as we read the Gospel of Mark, we shall be enlightened through what is recorded in this Gospel.

The Lord Jesus, as portrayed in the Gospel of Mark, was different from any other man who had ever lived. In the Old Testament we see the living of those who came before the Lord Jesus. Many of those who lived before the time of Christ were men of culture, religion, ethics, and morality. Some cared for philosophy, and others were for the improvement of character. Some sought to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. But in Mark we see a Man who is in an altogether different category. This One — the Lord Jesus — lives in the kingdom of God. Actually, He Himself is the kingdom.

The development of the Lord as the seed of the kingdom

In 1:1 and 14 we read of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel of God. This gospel is also the gospel of the kingdom of God. Not many Christians have realized that the kingdom of God is a person. The kingdom eventually becomes a corporate person. The seed of the kingdom is an individual, the Lord Jesus. As the Sower, He came to sow Himself as the seed of the kingdom into His disciples. Now this seed is developing into the corporate kingdom of God. This kingdom is actually the Body of Christ. The development of the Lord as the seed of the kingdom is His Body, and His Body is His increase, His enlargement.

This understanding of the kingdom of God is certainly different from the traditional concept of the kingdom. According to the New Testament, the kingdom of God is the enlargement of the Person of Christ. The kingdom is the development of the seed, which is Jesus Christ. Today this development of Christ is the church. Hence, the church as Christ's Body is the kingdom of God.

The dispensing of the Triune God

As the One who is the seed of the kingdom of God, the Lord Jesus lived a life that is altogether different from a life of culture, religion, ethics, morality, improvement of character, philosophy, and the effort to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. The life He lived was according to God's New Testament economy. As we have seen, God's economy is a matter of the dispensing of Himself — the Triune God — into His believers.

Only the kind of life lived by the Lord Jesus is a life in which the Triune God is dispensed into God's chosen people. A living that is according to culture, religion, ethics, and morality is not the living that dispenses God into man. No matter how cultured, religious, ethical, or moral you may be, in that kind of living there will be no dispensing of the Triune God into others. Confucius, for example, taught ethics, and he behaved in a moral, ethical way. Nevertheless, in his living there was not the dispensing of the Triune God into people. The same is true with respect to those who lived a life of philosophy or improvement of character, and even of those who tried to be spiritual, scriptural, holy, and victorious. Praise the Lord that in His life there was the dispensing of the Triune God into His chosen people!

The seed of life as the embodiment of the Triune God

We have emphasized the fact that the gospel, which is a new beginning, terminates all the old things. When the Lord Jesus was baptized, the old things were buried. In His living after His baptism, a living that was according to the New Testament economy of God, the Lord Jesus sowed Himself as the seed of life into His believers.

The seed sown by the Lord Jesus, a seed that was actually the Lord Jesus Himself, is the embodiment of the Triune God. This means that the Lord Jesus is nothing less than the very embodiment of the Triune God. This is proved in the Gospel of John. The Word in the beginning, the Word which was God, became flesh (John 1:1, 14). This indicates that Jesus is the very God. Through incarnation He became the seed of life, and in His ministry He sowed this seed into others. This means that into His followers He sowed Himself as the embodiment of the Triune God.

If we see that such a seed was sown into the Lord's disciples, we shall have a proper basis for understanding the Gospel of Mark as a portrait of the life that is fully according to and for God's New Testament economy.

(Excerpts from Life- Studies of Mark Message 61)

Burdens for Church Prayer

- Prayer for Labor Day Conference, for the saints' participation, for the Lord's speaking and for a receiving heart
- 2026 Targets, # of baptized:22; # of prayer meeting attendance:35; average Lord's Day and small group attendance:10% increase
- Spread the kingdom of God by preaching the gospel on the WVC campus and by Bible distribution in the community.
- Multiply the number of small groups for the increase and building up of the Body of Christ
- Perfect young working saints with shepherding families as containers for the next generation.
- Practice PSRP, BNPB, and vital small groups.
- Blending in the Body, by participating in conferences and trainings
- Establish and strengthen the church services, including children, YP, ushering, etc.
- Establish a prayer life individually and corporately
- Pursuing the truth and growth in life to live in the reality of the kingdom.

Announcements

- Life-study of Mark MSG 61, 62
- HWMR for Labor Day Conference: Building up the house of God in the local churches, Week 3
- 8/118(Tue) 7:45pm, Prayer meeting at home by small group.
- 8/22 10am. On-line Lessons on small groups by br. Minoru
- 9/4-6 NorCal Labor Day Conference held at Burlingame Hyatt, <https://www.hyatt.com/events/en-US/group-booking/SFOBU/G-BLEN>
- 9/5(Sat.) noon, NorCal Churches picnic blending, register here, https://script.google.com/macros/s/AKfycbyH5Mwj_dV0-jYVS61kbbiIW-mlIFRh0hNZTBKyn0jy6J8wOs26rL9DB2fvbo9sNvFJ/exec
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