

IT'S TIME!

It's time. The expectant mother wakes her mate up in the middle of the night. If it is her first, she's not exactly sure because her body has never done this before. She may have waited for an hour and let him sleep. But when she can't stand it any longer she taps him on the shoulder and says, "It's time."

From then on everything is a blur. The inevitable will occur. The mother's body must deliver this dearly loved foreign object. A child will be born. There is no turning back.

The text in the Bible that covers the life of Jesus is just under 10% of the total. In my favorite Bible that is 154 pages. Four different writers wrote this material. We call their four documents the four Gospels. In broad generalities, they all wrote their documents in the last half of the first century. Plenty of people were around to discredit their writing if it were not true. But that didn't happen. The first words out of Jesus' mouth as recorded by the four Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) is different in every case. They actually start with four different events in Jesus' life. Probably Mark wrote his gospel first then Matthew and Luke and finally John. They all record precise events in Jesus' life. There are only 2 incidents recorded about Jesus' birth and one when he was about 12 years old. All the Gospels emphasize the final 3 years of his life and especially the events of the last week. Other than a few quotes from historians of the day this is all we know. But then again when for example, Josephus—a Jewish historian, gives us a few sentences on Jesus, we do affirm

from non-biblical sources that Jesus is a historical character. Josephus was no fan—just a neutral historian. If you have a historical bent, Google “Josephus and Jesus” and “Tacitus and Jesus” and you will enter the zone of the historian. Not my zone. See ball. Hit ball. Remember?

For this book, all the material is based on a few quotes from the Gospel of Mark. You can find it by looking in the Table of Contents of any Bible you have. I would recommend you make sure it is a translation completed in the last 50 years or so and that you find a copy in large enough print so that it is pleasant to read. Failing that you can download Mark chapter by chapter and print it out for yourself from www.biblegateway.com. The accepted chapter and verse divisions in the Bible were not part of the original but have been in standard use for centuries. They make a handy way to find a particular sentence. Often the verses are little superscript numbers sprinkled throughout the middle of paragraphs. For that matter, the paragraphs and sentence divisions weren't part of the original text either. The document was written in common Greek which was pretty pervasive much like English is today. Mark told the whole story in about 14,000 words. This book will more than double that length. By all means, please take an hour and read Mark from top to bottom and get the whole story. In fact, I would encourage you to stop reading this and go do that first. Then you can come back here and see if I am picking out the material that captures the essence of what Jesus wanted those who were not yet his followers to know. That was the basis on which I selected the quotes we will examine.

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Jesus quoted in Mark 1:15)

Wow! Do you see what a mouthful that is? Jesus certainly didn't sneak up on anybody. There is no, “Hi how are you? Are you having a nice day? Is this a good time to chat?” In fact, if you check out the other three Gospels you will see that even though they are starting at different points in his life, each of them starts with a strong and significant statement.

However, let us note from the beginning that it is clear we are getting the condensed version of what Jesus said whenever the Gospel writers record his statements. There are probably several reasons for this. One of the significant reasons is that in the first century everything that was recorded in writing had to be laboriously hand copied. That is a difference between then and now. I am writing this book in about one week using voice-recognition technology. It will be published within a few months with an unlimited number of copies available. Information dissemination was much different in Jesus' time. It was harder. And they needed to conserve words. But they did make every effort to be accurate. It is clear that Jesus wanted to get people's attention with significant content, not with any form of entertaining content. And by the way they did have lots of distractions to entertain in the New Testament era just like we do.

And while we are at it let's cover a commonly held error. It surprises me when people buy into this one. I think they learned it in the lunch room at high school or over a few beers in the pub at college. (Now that is a place to work out the meaning of the universe. Pool your ideas and see what consensus arises.) Here is the argument. "There are so many versions of the Bible and so many changes over the years we haven't any idea what Jesus actually said." They usually add something like this on the front end, "It is a proven scientific fact ..." That ends all discussion. Ever heard that one? Sure you have. Did you ever ask for the source of that evidence? There is none. None. As a matter of record you can Google this one if you like; there are thousands of ancient hand written copies of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that go way back hundreds of years before the printing press. These are used as the basis for every modern "version" of which I am aware. There is scarcely one word in 200 over which there is any textual variation at all. The word "version" doesn't mean different formations of the story. It simply means "translation." Take any translation you like as far as your pursuit is concerned. Or better get a bunch of them from the bookstore. You go ahead and figure out how much essential discrepancy there is for yourself. You will find the same message. You can't get off the hook with

that ploy and be an intellectually honest person at the same time. Now let's get back to the facts here.

Let there be no doubt about it. Jesus had some things to say. When a house is on fire you don't knock on a door and say, "Excuse me, but if it is not too much trouble I think it may be useful for you to consider the possibility that there is an unusual occurrence of an incendiary nature happening with your domicile which you may wish to check out in due course." Urgency demands that you simply say, "Your house is on fire!" In fact, you had better put the appropriate urgency in your voice and on your face or your message may not be received.

It's time.

I'm going to use this next question a lot in this book so get used to it. What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "*The time has come?*" (Mark 1:15)

What time? Well, whatever time it is you can be sure that Jesus was pointing to a major shift. Whatever Jesus has to say to us, you can start with the assumption that he expects to frame things differently than you have ever known before. This is not a question of a midcourse correction. It is not a matter of learning a few optional principles that might, should you choose to employ them in your life, give you preferential treatment in time or eternity. Seems to be a, "Your house is on fire!" moment, doesn't it?

Further notice that he is not repeating something that has already been true in the universe. The grammar doesn't allow for that. You can't assume that Jesus is just stating the obvious. "Ho-hum. Yes, I knew that. The kingdom of God has always been near. I'm okay with that."

Bear in mind, Jesus is speaking largely to a Jewish audience. This Jewish audience in Palestine has an overlay of Roman political dominance and is heavily steeped in Greek culture. There are a whole bunch of world religions available to them in this cosmopolitan world. They are not naive. Jesus is not

breaking on the scene as the first religious teacher. Jesus is not unaware of the world around him. And what he is saying is different. Very different. He is not saying here is a new option for you to consider. He uses the definite article "the." This is a unique and special time. That is what makes this information hot.

The key concepts in the full statement of Mark 1:15 are these. Now. Kingdom of God. Near. Repent. Believe. Good news. Agreed? Of course, he hasn't given us a whole lot of content for each of these concepts. But they are strong words. Therefore, they clearly stand in contradistinction to everything else that has gone on up until that point in history.

So you have the headlines. That ought to be enough to get you to read the story wouldn't you think? You can't accuse Jesus of wanting to blend in with the religious landscape.

So here we go. Right out of the box. Jesus is not a lobbyist. Jesus is not a negotiator attempting to bring all sides to an understanding of their common beliefs. He doesn't start with the premise that he will accept you no matter what. This is no image of a gentle-faced-arms-wide-open social worker who has come to provide comfort. This is a wake-up call. No, that's not strong enough. This is a house-on-fire call!

Jesus is on record and we are getting down to the hot brass tacks of it all. The concert has started. This is no gentle Brahms' lullaby. This is a bang bang, everybody on your feet, we are going to stir things up, rocking kind of event. If you take the challenge even to breeze through the events in the life of Jesus you are going to find bold statements, astounding events, radical demands, controversy and conflict. You are going to find an individual who was either an arrogant megalomaniac who should have been written off a long time ago or you are going to find something else. But one thing you are not going to find is some nice piece of religious art with everyone standing around with dreamy

looks on their faces blindly admiring one individual in the center with a glowing aura and in stature a foot and a half above the quiet crowd.

It's time.

Procrastination is the thief of time. Sometimes delay is a good thing. It is important to make sure you don't simply act out of haste when you don't have to. If you are like me, and I suspect you are, you have made some really bad choices because you didn't think things through in advance. It might have been that you made some desperate life-altering choices that you deeply regret and you can now see that if you had only thought about it longer you would have taken a different course. At its extreme, we recognize that prisons are full of people who made a very bad snap decision. Thoughtful delay may be good. But just putting a decision off when we don't want to face the decision is not wise. If there is more information that needs to come to light then you have something to think about. But if there could not be any more important information no matter what. It's time.

I don't agree with this premise but you might think it is bad timing for you to alter your life course and follow Jesus. Even if I grant you plenty of delay time in coming to a final choice about Jesus, you would agree would you not, that doing your research now is a very good thing?

It's time to figure out what Jesus meant when he said, "*The time has come.*" (Mark 1:15) Even if you reject it, it's worth a look, isn't it? It's time to figure out what Jesus meant by the "*kingdom of God.*" Mark records the use of this term by Jesus 14 times. That has to be significant wouldn't you think? Why would you give a rip for what some guru says on a TV talk show until you get a handle on Jesus himself? It's time to figure out what Jesus meant when he said "*repent.*" Why would you settle for the definition some stand-up comic provides? It's time to figure out what Jesus meant when he said "*believe.*" Isn't it obvious that he wasn't simply talking about some general psychological mindset? It's time to figure out what Jesus meant when he said he had "*good news.*"

If you grew up with any religion whatsoever, don't you think it is time to reach some adult decisions about what you were taught? And if you grew up without consideration of Jesus why would you accept that without personal evaluation? Are you one of those who is willing to accept without examination the things you were taught about this? My experience shows that so many people have taken their definition of Jesus from some place other than the original documents. Many presume that it is too complicated to go back and figure this out on their own. How wrong that is. Some think the Bible is difficult to understand because they used a 400 year old translation as a child. Some think the Bible is difficult to understand because somebody said so. Others might tell you the story of the Bible is boring. How hard can it be to come to your own conclusion on that one? It will take you about an hour to read Mark from beginning to end. That is all I am asking you to do for now. You have probably spent more time watching reruns on television in the last week. Why not start from scratch? Why not find a quiet place and a Bible with decent sized print in a modern translation. I am using the New International Version but there are many others from which to choose. You don't have to get yourself an expensive leather bound version. Any inexpensive paper back will do. Virtually every bookstore has them. (If not, you might want to ask why not. The book is still the all time best seller, you know.) No excuses. It's time.

And, if you haven't taken a serious look at this message already, don't you think it's time to figure out when you are going to do that? Now is as good a time as any.