

7-27-25

Matriculate

Mark 1: 14 – 45

There are some words or phrases a preacher should not use from the pulpit or for that matter at any time in his life.

For example, words or phrases that discourage faith in God or cast doubt on God's provision should be avoided. For example, I should never say that I sure got lucky when I met Julie and that maybe you'll get lucky too someday when it comes to finding a spouse.

The pastor should never say ... This year I may finally win the lottery – if Lady Luck decides to smile down on me.

A pastor should also refrain from using cuss words or profanity. *“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen.”* Ephesians 4:29 (A good principle for all of us to follow, not just preachers.)

Singling out an individual is deemed highly inappropriate, especially when the topic of discussion is of a personal matter.

Slandorous talk is completely off limits as well and could potentially lead to a lawsuit.

Finally, talking too much about oneself is always a big turn off.

Preachers must never forget that their primary job is to paint a clear picture of God so that listeners will be moved to praise Him and make a heart-felt decision to follow Him.

Having said this, I want to use a word this morning that you've probably heard before but maybe aren't quite sure of its definition. But have no fear, I don't think it's off limits. The word is **matriculate**.

If you're an old football fan dating back to the 70's - which I am, so that means I'm old - you might recognize this word.

In Superbowl IV, Hank Stram, the head coach of the Kansas City Chiefs was mic'd up on the sidelines during the big game which was a first for any professional football game and this was seen as somewhat risky, considering how agitated some coaches can get in the heat of the battle.

Anyway, during the course of the gridiron duel which the Chiefs won decidedly over the Minnesota Vikings, Stram was recorded saying many crazy and colorful things. You can probably find his twenty-minute edited monologue on YouTube. And one thing he said was something on the order of "Okay boys, let's keep matriculating the ball down the field!"

From that point forward, **matriculate** has become part of the NFL's jargon, legend and folklore even though **matriculate** really has nothing to do with advancing a football down the field!

If you look in Webster's dictionary – and I have a very big and heavy one in my office called the "Deluxe Encyclopedic Edition" – under the word **matriculate**, the definition reads... "To enroll in a university or college or to be enrolled as a member of a university or college."

Well, what in the world does this have to do with football? Albeit most colleges and universities do have football teams.

The point in all this is to say that I see both definitions of the word being played out in in Mark chapter 1 – both the real definition and Hank Stram’s comical made up one.

On the one hand, four young men are matriculating to a higher level of education and are becoming members of a body that is going to change them in the most profound ways possible because of the hand of God on their lives.

On the other hand, they are joining a team that has as its goal the matriculation of the proverbial football down the field toward paydirt as Hank Stram so vividly described.

But instead of Hank Stram at the helm. It is Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of the Jews, the Holy One of God, the Savior of the World. And the football is the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

And the playing field? I’ll get to that in a moment.

Joining a team and becoming a member of team can be a great opportunity. And I ‘m not just talking about a sports team. When you go to work, you’re on a team. Whether you’re on ,,,

the assembly line at Ford

in a cubicle

in a band

a construction crew

or church body your efforts are linked with other individuals who are striving to meet a common goal.

Much of the time, being on a team can be quite rewarding and fulfilling. Other times, it can be extremely challenging even to the point of being intolerable.

Anyone who has ever been in the work force for any length of time knows exactly what I'm talking about. Sometimes the team just clicks, and the chemistry of the people feels right.

Other times, if a change isn't made soon, the team crashes and there is a considerable amount of collateral damage.

In Mark chapter 1, we see Jesus, the head coach, gathering his team. In a very real sense, Jesus is on a recruiting trip, and he has his sights set on two sets of brothers: Simon and Andrew, James and John.

Notice how eager the brothers are to sign up after Jesus invites them to follow Him – and they were not offered riches, fame or other comforts of the world!

At first, it almost seems that their decision to follow Jesus is too spontaneous - too rash. But upon further review, we realize that this isn't their first encounter with their future head coach.

We read in John chapter 1 how John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to at least two of his disciples: *"The next day John [the Baptist] was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus."*

John even writes that these two disciples hung out with Jesus for a day, and that one of those disciples was in fact Andrew. The other was presumably John, the author of the Gospel.

It was almost as if John the Baptist was the boys' high school coach, and now he's giving his stamp of approval for the boys' new college coach.

So, do you see the matriculation that occurred?

First, these young men were raised in good Jewish homes and learned about God from an early age, about his principles, his values and his holy nature.

Their parents took very seriously God's commandments as written in Deuteronomy 6: *"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. **Impress them on your children.***

Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

These parents must have done an admirable job raising their sons. If they hadn't, I don't think they would have been so eager to jump on the Lord's band wagon.

In fact, the most important thing the parents probably taught them was to seek opportunities to **matriculate** to the next level.

This is why they had become disciples of John the Baptist. They recognized that the hand of God was on John and that he had much to teach anyone who was willing to listen and be open to God's word.

And so, after a time, John the Baptist encouraged them to **matriculate** again, this time joining the Anointed One's school – God incarnate school – the Word become flesh school.

It was an opportunity they could not afford to pass up.

John the Baptist showed them the way.

Their parents prayed for this.

And now it was becoming reality.

Parents, there is nothing more important we can do for our children than to encourage them to **matriculate** into the school of Christ. But we can't just wake up one day and tell our teenager that it's time to follow Christ and join his team.

We must encourage them to do so by first, living it out in our own lives, and second by teaching them at a very early age when they're still moldable and teachable.

If we decide to wait until they're older, after they're set in their worldly ways, the matriculation process may not take, and even if it does, the transition won't be an easy one.

So, let's talk about these young men, Simon, Andrew, James and John matriculating to the Messiah's University:

Their professor/mentor is none other than Jesus of Nazareth himself, the man whom John the Baptist had pointed out as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and who, when baptized was declared as the Son of God by His Father's voice coming down from heaven along with a dove: *"You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased."*

The program of study?

Well, let's just call it the **Backyard Bible Club**. Afterall, Mark tells us that Jesus' first stop after calling his disciples was Capernaum, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, only a day's hike from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth.

Simon, who would eventually be called Peter, actually lived in Capernaum and his house would serve as Jesus' base of operations during his extended ministry in Galilee. Capernaum was literally in Nazareth's backyard.

Have you looked in your backyard to see who you can minister to? We don't need to travel to far away palces to find someone who is in desperate need of God and his mercy.

What is the curriculum at the Messiah University to which these men have **matriculated**?

From my understanding, based on what I've read, it seems to be three – fold: To proclaim, to teach and to live out or minister God's truth through their own personal lives to their neighbors.

Do you see the proclaiming part?

This is the preaching part. Mark 1:14 says that *“after John the Baptist was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news of God, saying the time has come. The kingdom of God is near Repent and believe the good news!”*

You see, the Galilean community was in the midst of a losing a very strong and spiritual preacher in the person of John the Baptist, but

Jesus was not going to let John's words fall on deaf ears or let his efforts be in vain.

Jesus picked up the slack and filled the gap with own his voice and his own words and through them, drew committed disciples to Himself.

There can never be enough preachers of the Gospel in this world. Some might think that the airwaves and the TV are over-saturated with people proclaiming the message of God.

Well, there may be lots of preachers out there filling the airwaves, but that doesn't necessarily make them Bible-believing preachers. Your own life, as you live according to God's principles, is a like a living sermon lived out before those who observe you. Let's do our best to make the message a clear one that honors Him.

So, the first aspect of the Messiah's University course of study to which these men have **matriculated** is to Hear Jesus preach and to find their own voice when it comes to proclaiming God's Good News.

James is going to share the gospel differently than John and Andrew's going to do it differently than his brother Simon, you're going to share it differently than the person sitting next to you, but the goal remains the same: Giving glory to God for who He is and what He has done in your life.

What did Jesus say to his disciples when they finally found Jesus in a lonely place after struggling to locate Him one morning? *"Let us go somewhere else – to nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."*

Wow, this is quite a statement by Jesus.

He didn't say let's go to the next village so I can heal many people or cast out lots of demons or perform fantastic miracles. He says let us go there so I can preach the good news about my Father and the Kingdom of God coming.

He's ranking the proclamation and interpretation of God's word right up there with healings and miracles and exorcisms!

And why can he do this?

Because God's word and His Spirit is the power through which people are healed and miracles are performed and evil spirits are rendered helpless and impotent.

Recall the first confrontation Jesus had with the evil spirit right in Capernaum's synagogue. All Jesus had to do was command the spirit to come out of the man, and it had to obey.

The second part of the Messiah's curriculum is the teaching part.

Mark writes in 1:21 that Jesus and his new recruits *"went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach."*

This shouldn't surprise any of us that Jesus did this unless perhaps you're not too familiar with the purpose of the synagogue. Just think of the synagogue as the Jewish version of a Christian church. It's where the people of God in a certain geographic location would meet together to hear God's word and worship Him – and not only hearing God's word but reciting it, memorizing it and following it.

One inscription in a second century synagogue that archeologists found says this: “Theodotus Vettanos, priest and synagogue leader... built this synagogue for the purpose of the reading of the Law and for the instruction of the commandments of the Law.”

And I quote from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: “The synagogue service had a two-fold purpose: to praise the Lord and to educate the people.”

It goes without saying then, that it makes perfect sense that Jesus would start his Messiah’s University at a synagogue. Remember, the synagogue, on many levels, is analogous to the Christian church.

So teaching and preaching are two of the key components that these young men will engage in at the Master’s University.

The last two are ministry and prayer. We read about all the people Jesus heals early on in his ministry which he continues throughout his three and a half years. In doing so, Mark tells us that it becomes a great inconvenience for our Lord. *“Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people came to him from everywhere.”*

And if they came to him, that means they also came to Simon and Andrew, James and John – these young men, who have matriculated into the Messiah’s School of Ministry.

Will they be ready to put into practice what they are learning?

What about you? Have you matriculated to the School of Christ?

Jesus is inviting each of us.

It’s an offer we cannot afford to miss.