

## Repent and Believe in the Gospel

Mark 1:14–15

<sup>14</sup> Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

### PRAY

#### The Galilean Ministry

**v. 14** — Mark begins his account of the ministry of Jesus with the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist, arrested in the southern part of Israel, and Jesus heading into ministry in the northern part, in Galilee. John’s public ministry concluded, he will soon be dead, his head lifted from his shoulders — the price he paid for telling God’s truth. As John decreases, if you will, Jesus increases.

Mark focuses his Gospel account on the Galilean ministry for half the book — Chapter 1, v. 14 through 8:26. In the Gospel according to **John**, **he** records an earlier season of ministry in Judea, in the southern part of Israel. It’s a reminder that the Gospels cover different aspects of Christ’s ministry. Over all John selects different focal points than the three synoptic Gospels. When we put them all four together we have the perfect picture God intends for us to have about the life of Christ. Not everything that Jesus did is recorded. In the last verse of John, he writes, “Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” I point this out to expose shallow arguments that say, “If the Gospels don’t all say the same thing, there must be errors.” The Gospels don’t disagree; they present the ministry of Jesus from different perspectives and places.

Today I want to examine 3 critically important things in our two short verses: The Content of Jesus’ ministry; The Context of Jesus’ Ministry, and the Commands of Jesus’ ministry — **Content, Context, Commands**. If we are to be Christians, that is, like little Christs as the term infers, we do well to understand Christ’s ministry pattern, then pattern our own messaging, urgency, and moral clarity to match his. We will spend most of our time on the commands. We need to know what he commands, and we must obey his commands to receive his blessing of life.

#### The Content of Jesus Ministry

**v. 14** — Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, **proclaiming the gospel of God...**

## 2

So we immediately see the first issue of content . Jesus was proclaiming the Gospel of God. God's Gospel is the content of his ministry. Two weeks ago we defined the elements of the Gospel of God, and we'll simply summarize it now. There are 5 points: God, Man, Sin, Jesus, Response.

- The triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — created all there is for his glory.
- Man — male and female — were the crown of creation, created in his image. They were made to worship and commune with God and tend the Garden, exercising dominion over his creation.
- Sin entered through treasonous defiance, and communion, nearness, and blessing were irretrievably lost. Irretrievable, that is, in man's efforts. But God reconciles through Jesus.
- Jesus — the Savior, came human form to reconcile the world to the Father by paying the deadly wages of sin, and then conquered death by rising from the grave.
- Response — the dual acts of faith and repentance that God gives those who come to him.

This is the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed: We can be made right with God through Jesus' substitutionary death and resurrection. As it was the message of Jesus, so it must be the message of the Church. Our greatest need is not education, or relief from poverty, or freedom from tyrannical rulers. Our greatest need is not comfort or security. It is not to be accepted for who I am as I embrace whatever notion springs up from my desperately corrupt heart. Indeed, my heart is what is wrong with me. My greatest need is to hear the Gospel, respond to the Gospel, be transformed by the Gospel, and then serve the King who effects the Gospel. So as the Gospel was the content of Jesus' ministry, the Gospel is the content of our ministry. It's the message we preach. There are indeed things that flow from Gospel-transformed hearts. Preferential treatment and favoritism are ended since Christ died for all, making us all one. The way I invest and spend the resources of life has changed. Who and how I love is changed. But those are not the content or root of our message. They are the product and the fruit of the Gospel. This is concise statement of our: "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Believe this. Make this the content of your life's message. We can be forgiven in Christ and live in his righteousness. Don't be charmed by lesser, feckless arguments.

### **The Context of Jesus' Ministry**

**v. 15 — The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand The Kingdom is at hand.**

**The time is fulfilled.** What time? The time all that the Law and prophets predicted as they pointed to Christ and prepared his way. This is the fullness of the redemption story: Christ, the Messiah, has come right on God's schedule, as we are told in Galatians 4.

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This is not just an announcement of time. It's announcement of existential reality. God's Kingdom is established and open for business. This is the context for Jesus' ministry. It's a dramatic schedule-interrupting, life-reorienting announcement that disrupts regularly scheduled life and demands immediate attention. You see, his kingdom is not the next expression of government until another election or bigger king rolls around, or some human institution or state structure. Righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne. This King divides the unrighteous from the righteous, the sheep from the goats. The wells of salvation are open. Communion is restored. All nations shall come and worship. He is bringing down the proud and destroying the works of sin and self-righteousness. He sets captives free. He opens blind eyes and binds up the wounds of the broken. His kingdom transcends human rulers and up-ends human wisdom. He subjects all things to his rule and reign. Jesus is calling us away from conventional wisdom and workaday routines to joyfully serve in his now-arriving kingdom. Things have changed. It's all different from here on out.

Do you hear Jesus' clarion call to adjust to his kingdom this morning? This world and its kingdoms are passing away, but his unshakable kingdom has arrived. "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. ... he removes kings and sets up kings (Daniel 2:20–21a) — The Eternal King establishes his Eternal kingdom. What sense does it make to serve any other kingdom, including your own? Sharpen your attention and focus, even now in the sermon. The kingdom of God is here. It's all the ultimately matters. Move into his Kingdom and serve the King. The Content of his ministry is the Gospel. The Context of his ministry is the arrival of the eternal kingdom. And the commands of his ministry are repent and believe.

#### **The Commands of Jesus' Ministry**

The end of v. 15 — **Repent and believe in the gospel.** These are twin commands that are both required to enter God's kingdom, which makes them of inescapable importance. We need to see three things: 1. Every person is a moral agent; 2. We are failed moral agents; 3. God has provided a remedy to our failure in the Gospel.

First, quickly note how Jesus did evangelism: Repent! He begins there because this is our greatest threat: We are sinners. I must know this. If I don't know this, my greatest threat will ultimately cause my eternal death. Modern evangelism that begins with, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," feeds the sinful self's ego. "Of course God loves me! Why wouldn't he love me. I am

lovable.” This is like giving morphine to someone dying of cancer. The pain goes away, but death advances unchecked. That gets us to our first point: We are moral agents

His first command is a moral imperative because we are moral agents. What does that mean? Like a secret agent? Not, it means that we have capacity to choose good rather than evil, and that we are to do so. This is part of the beauty being image bearers of God. We can understand what is right, and we are accountable to do so. Accountable to whom? To the one who made us and has the moral authority to call us to repent. He calls me and you away from the deadly sin that is inherent in us.

We are accountable moral agents; cheesecake is not. What does that mean? A modern parable:

The pastor is overweight. Rather, let’s say a pastor is overweight. Since moral failure is not inside the pastor, but outside of him, he can’t be overweight; he is undisciplined and will not bring his body under the discipline of godly moderation. No, it is that the temptingly delicious cheesecake his neighbor makes that causes him to be fat. Therefore the cheesecake is evil. Therefore evil cheesecake must be confiscated and destroyed. Further, those who make and deliver cheesecake are immoral. Evil cheesecake and evil cheesecake purveyors must be called to repent, but not pastors who eat it.

So we see, don’t we, how our culture’s refusal to accept moral agency, and its failure to grasp the moral authority of Christ to call us to repent has deeply impacted us and left us without remedy for the moral disaster in which we find ourselves. You see, at the end of the day, after cheesecake has been prohibited, the pastor remains sinfully undisciplined — he is a failed moral agent. But rejecting truth, he now directs his unbridled appetite to chocolate shakes, to his caloric demise.

The command to repent is really grace, isn’t it, because it calls from moral failure and its consequences. “If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts.” So declares Psalm 7. It is merciful that Jesus commands that we flee God’s sword, and bow, and the deadly weapons of his wrath fired at the unrepentant. It is love that reorients us to truth and life, aiming at the root of what kills us, not some phony scapegoat. We are already guilty, born in sin, conceived in sin, doers of sin. He could simply send out judgment. But he calls us to change our thinking and turn from what kills and destroys to turn to him who saves and heals.

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I could go on, but I think that's sufficient for us to hear great love in the command to repent. Let's move to the second part of the command by noting this truth: when we are commanded to repent, we are told what we are to change our thinking and our believing to. Jesus does not call us from our human opinions and notions to adopt someone else's human notions and opinions, as though we just need to think this thing through a bit better. Horizontal adjustments do no good, since there are none righteous, no not even one. We are commanded to repent of our ways and believe the Gospel. The Gospel is not a human plan. In fact, it is foolishness in the eyes of man. The Gospel is God's plan.

The second command of Jesus' ministry is believe in the Gospel. The Gospel is the revealed truth of God for salvation and restored relationship with our God through Jesus, as we have seen. It is revealed in the Scriptures, not devised by man. We will see Jesus revealed as the Son of God as we work through Mark, and this is the Gospel to which we are to adjust our thinking and our believing.

In our closing moments, I want to deal with saving faith, or belief. The two words are synonyms. As we walked through the aspects of the Gospel, consider the final element: God, Man, Sin, Jesus, Response. The element of response is captured by the command to believe in the Gospel. You are to believe in Jesus Christ, the Prophet revealing the truth of God, our Priest who paid the price of sin for us, and our King, who has conquered the enemy of death and conquers our rebellious hearts until we joyfully live under his rule and reign. We are to live our lives demonstrating that these things are true.

I was pleased to hear our children express some very orthodox definitions of faith in our last Thursday night Community Group. Saving faith involves not simply an acknowledgement of what truth is, but submitting one's life to that truth.

### **There are different stages of belief**

In the post-Christian West, there is often rank unbelief, a deliberate hardening of the heart, a suppressing of the truth to reject the knowledge of God that is plain and displayed in creation. That hardening actually moves one even further from God than you were, leaving you in profound moral darkness, but still accountable to God for the truth that is denied. When the fool says in his heart there is no god, that is an expression of immoral rebellion and ingratitude. And it's deadly.

Moving down the spectrum, there is an awareness of God realized from creation, the General Revelation as we call it. As Psalm 19 expressed in the Call to Worship, we know that there is a God

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somewhere, and the creation witnesses about him, making us accountable to him. But the creation is not sufficient to reveal how we are to come to God, or the fullness of who God is. This is inadequate belief — Inadequate, because this level of faith can't save. When you travel in other parts of the world, you encounter this level of belief more than anything else. You find a candid acknowledgement that there must be a god, but disoriented opinions on who god is. This inadequate faith may find expressions in animism, voodoo, Islam, Buddhism, and so on. But God has not appointed any of those as the Gospel.

After acknowledging there is a god of some kind, and perhaps crafting some religion to serve a false god, the next step in faith is one of coming to know the only God, the true God who reveals himself in Jesus. As Jesus says in John 14:6 — “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. This is the God we are to know and believe. This is the one who makes atonement for sins and rose on the third day. We are to believe Jesus and his Gospel. But if you believe that there is one triune God — Father, Son, Spirit — and that Jesus has come in the flesh and is king of kings and lord of lords, and that's all you acknowledge, you have reached the level of faith of demons, as James 2:19 says. Demons know these things to be true of God, and they tremble, but they are not saved by the Gospel.

Faith that saves is paired with repentance that changes the mind and lives under Christ's Lordship and loves him. As the Kingdom of God is at hand, and the King of the Kingdom is here, saving faith submits one's life to this King of Kings and lives in obedience to him. This is what it is to be a citizen of God's kingdom. This is saving faith. This is the faith we are commanded to have in atoning work of the Savior on his cross, rejecting all self-effort and merit.

Beloved, we must think and believe with this kind of moral clarity or we will never be able to speak with this kind of moral clarity, which will make us absolutely worthless and unhelpful in pointing anyone to life and wholeness in Christ. Do you believe this Gospel? Are you thinking, as is so common now in relativism, that, “Well, yes, I believe in Jesus, but others have different thoughts and it will all work out.” Repent! And believe in the Gospel! The Gospel is not only someone else's only hope — It's your only hope! Let's come to grips with the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus who redeems the world to himself. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus, the Son of God. I am not asking you to come around to my opinion, I am proclaiming the truth of the Gospel with the moral authority of the Savior who calls us to himself and commands us: Repent. Believe this Gospel. Amen.