

Sermon Series: “10 Words from Jesus on Sharing the Faith”
“# 3 Repent: The Commencement of the Kingdom Message”
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One of the hardest thing we will ever have to do is to change our ways while in mid-stream. Sometimes we have to go back three steps in order to go forward one. E.g., I recall I recently bought an adapter for my computer so I could plug more things into it, like a DVD/CD player, and then I looked online and found another adapter for about the same price and had more features that I liked. So I had to make the decision— do I go to all the trouble to go back to the store and return the adapter and then order the other one, or do I do nothing. Sometime we have to go back three steps to go forward one. E.g., I recall this when I was once preparing to start a new sermon series. I thought I had the right idea of a sermon series and I had done some reading and preparation for it and even started to promote it in the bulletin. And then, wouldn't you know it, I heard someone talking about something going on in his walk with the Lord, and I just felt the Holy Spirit say to me— that is what you need to address in a sermon series. My first reaction was, ok Lord, I can see the need for that, but I have already started work on this one I have been planning! This is a bit inconvenient! So I thought and prayed about it, and took some time to plan out what the new series would look like, and I sensed the Lord's leading with it— and I was right! So that explains how I came to the present sermon series. Sometimes we have to go back three steps to go forward one. Sometimes we get a head of steam, and we are involved with something, and we sense the Lord giving us a course correction. What do you do when that happens? What do I do? Today we are going to look at a passage where we come to understand a core part of the Christian message is about course correction.

READ Matthew 4:17-22 (pp. 3-4)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just heard about John the Baptist being arrested. He now knows it's time to start out in His ministry with words which frame His message. So Jesus moves His home from Nazareth to Capernaum in Galilee, right on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

READ v 17. “After word spread that John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus began His ministry with the ‘tone setting’ call of two parts: change your ways and God’s reign was now emerging in human history. Cf. 3:2; 10:7.” Jesus, when He began His ministry, was set on one thing from His followers: change coming with His Kingdom. We see this emphasized with John the Baptist in 3:2 and the disciples in their preaching in 10:7. We see that whenever there is a significant need for doing things differently. Sometimes we see it in politicians. E.g., when Barak Obama became president he proclaimed the message of “hope and change”; we might not like the changes he brought, but at least we were warned! We see it in sports. E.g., when Sean Payton came to the New Orleans Saints, which was a losing team, he got advice from his mentor Bill Parcells, who said that everything in the organization has to change— not just the athletes and coaches, but also the administration, staff, cook staff, etc. That is kind of how Jesus begins His ministry. The verb for repent, μετανοέω, means more literally the change of mind (after mind). And as people repent, they will be ushered into the Kingdom Jesus is bringing. The verb for “come near” (ἐγγίζω; here the perfect, ἤγγικεν) seems to indicate something that is here but not completely here— it is emerging. What is emerging is God’s reign, which the phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” implies— notice that in Mark, Luke, and John we read of the “Kingdom of God”. We need to remember that. E.g., I recall this past week we were in the Addressing the Skeptics class and we discussed miracles, and if miracles happen, why do people

have toothaches, and why was Auschwitz not stopped. Part of that answer is we don't know all of God's reasons for bringing a healing miracle or deliverance miracle, but also we need to remember that the Kingdom of God has not come in its fullness—we are not in heaven. But God does reign, and we catch glimpses of that at times, don't we? E.g., I recall a friend who is an alcoholic, but he came to Christ and gave his life to Him, and by God's grace he is no longer drinking. I know of another church that has a ministry to those with an addiction to pornography. These are all expressions of God's reign coming on earth.

READ vv 18-22. “What did an appropriate response to Jesus' message look like? They were to follow Jesus and thus fish for a different kind of catch! This new life took precedence over job and family. Cf. Matthew 8:14-17; Luke 5:1-10.” We see in Luke's gospel another scene of Jesus with Peter, and that Peter and James and John were partners together in the fishing business. Apparently Jesus had some interaction with the disciples before He called them in Matthew 4; what we have here is a summary of what happened. It is clear that following Jesus took precedence over all else that is important in their lives. It is important to remember that while following Jesus is more important than family, family is still very important, as can be seen in Matthew 8:14-17 where Peter is married and his mother-in-law is sick, and Jesus heals her. Sometimes people forget the first priority Jesus is to play, and the world needs to see it but often don't see it from people who profess to be Christians. E.g., I recall a lawyer who told me that he did not bring his faith into the office, but left it when he was there. This is an impossibility for the Christian, and I told him so. E.g., I recall my Dad, also a lawyer (and CPA), who told me there were times he did not enter into potentially financially lucrative dealings if there were a hint of inappropriateness to it; he was trying to teach me not to be so interested in getting wealthy if it mean doing something that was wrong or had the appearance of something wrong. And once

we come to follow Jesus, our focus will be on being a fisher of people. This is also, like repentance, another non-negotiable for the Christian. Just as fishermen don't always have great catches on some days, but do so on other days, so it is with sharing the gospel. E.g., I recall a friend of mine recently caught a marlin, but not all days were that good for him. Fishermen and fisherwomen keep learning how to do better in fishing. In the same way, we continue to learn how to share the gospel and invite people to follow Jesus. I can think of two helps in this area. First, we need to be ourselves in Christ. We don't need to act as our "authentic selves" and use foul language and gossip because such things come "natural" to us; indeed, it is this "authentic", "natural" self that drove Jesus to the cross— it is that part of us that needs to be redeemed and changed! E.g., I recall when reading Paul Little's book *How to Give Away Your Faith*, one of the things he learned was to have a good joke memorized as a way of making friends— a joke that would not dishonor the Lord. Second, we need to relate aspects of the secular world to the gospel. E.g., I remember Chuck Colson talking to a friend about the gospel and bringing up a scene from a recent popular movie that helped explain a part of the gospel. E.g., I can think of the movie "Shawshank Redemption"— even though it has some rough parts and is "R" rated, it has a clear redemptive message and Christian symbols. At the end of the movie, the main character who has been in a filthy, violent prison, Andy, escapes through the filthy sewer system, gets deposited in a creek, and it is storming raining outside; Andy stands up, and raises his arms with face pointed to the sky, a clear symbol of the rain washing him clean of the smut of the prison and sewer system, and he is now free to enjoy life in all its beauty. In many ways, that is what Jesus does for us— redeem us from a life filled with filth and arrogance and pride, and brings us out of the prison of sin into the a life of real joy, washed cleaned. So, one of the things I have learned is to try to be a good listener and direct the conversation

through questions that lead them to consider Christ— like, what is your understanding of what a Christian is? In this way we are helping relate the world in which a non-believer lives to the gospel.

“What is our response to Jesus’ call?” First, recognize that there is no such thing as a conversion without repentance. E.g., I recall a minister who had people come and join a church during the last hymn but with no membership class and without knowing where the people were spiritually. It does not mean that a person is perfect, but rather that a person has turned away from himself or herself as in control of their lives and has given control to the Lord. Second, we need to ask ourselves today: for whom is Jesus calling me to fish for His Kingdom?