

The Kingdom of God is at Hand - Mark 1:9-15 Sermon [n]

Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC):

Q. 87. What is repentance unto life?

A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavour after, new obedience.

WSC 87 Cross References

Acts 11:18; Acts 2:37; Joel 2:13; 2 Corinthians 7:11; Jeremiah 31:18,19; Acts 26:18; Psalm 119:59.

³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.

Psalm 130:3-4

Christ calls us to repent and believe the Gospel. Repentance and faith are inseparable. Repentance is the change of mind and heart towards sin, and faith is the understanding that we can trust in the person of Jesus as the one that finished the work on our behalf. Genuine repentance leads to faith, and faith naturally leads to repentance.

Randy Pope illustration:

Imagine we are all sailors under the command of a cruel, tyrannical captain. He rules by fear, manipulating us into obedience and driving us into destructive patterns. One day, however, a new captain boards the ship — kind, powerful, authoritative, and full of grace. He overthrows the old captain and takes command. Under his leadership, life begins to flourish. His authority brings freedom, peace, and purpose.

But then, out of nowhere, the old captain returns. He yells commands from the deck, and though he has no real power anymore, something in us still responds. We instinctively fall back into old habits and ways of thinking.

That's when the new captain comes to us and gently says, "You don't have to listen to him anymore. He has no authority here. You are free."

This illustration reflects the inner tension of the Christian life — the struggle between the flesh and the Spirit, between unbelief and trust. Even though we've been set free by Christ, the voice of our old nature still calls out, and at times we respond. The key is not to despair, but to remember who now commands the ship — to believe the voice of truth rather than the voice of fear.

Even though we may believe it, often our lives don't reflect this newfound truth in Christ. It is possible to intellectually know the truths of the Gospel but yet still not live in light of the Gospel. The good news hasn't actually resonated and taken root into our hearts.

v15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Believe:

1. You are God's Beloved

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

We see the beautiful declaration of the Sonship of Christ, the triune God in full display: Jesus coming out of the water, the Spirit descending on Him like a dove, and the voice of the Father speaking approval over the Son. This both aligns Jesus with the ministry of John we see earlier in Ch. 1, but it's also an inauguration of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus was baptized on our behalf - to identify with us sinners although He Himself was perfect. Jesus places Himself amongst the guilty. Jesus' baptism was not for His salvation but for ours. As baptism points to our death to sin and our new life in Christ, His baptism prefigures His ultimate work, suffering and dying on the cross to rise again.

But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented.

Matthew 3:15

Jesus's baptism was necessary "to fulfill all righteousness". Jesus perfectly completed every aspect of human righteousness on behalf. We call this Christ's active obedience, not passive. He was perfect in every single way and fulfilled all of God's laws, earning us a righteousness that was credited to us. Scripture tells us that in Christ, not only are our sins forgiven and we are reconciled with God, but we are counted as righteous by God the Father because of Christ. We are adopted into the family and God is well pleased.

Martin Luther refers to this as alien righteousness:

"For human beings by nature, when they get near either danger or death itself, will of necessity examine their own worthiness. We defend ourselves before all threats by recounting our good deeds and moral efforts. But then the remembrance of sins and flaws inevitably comes to mind, and this tears us apart, and we think, 'How many errors and sins and wrongs I have done! Please God, let me live so I can fix and amend them.' We become obsessed with our active righteousness and are terrified by its imperfections. But the real evil is that we trust our own power to be righteous and will not lift up our eyes to see what Christ has done for us. So the troubled conscience has no cure for its desperation and feeling of

unworthiness unless it takes hold of the forgiveness of sins by grace, offered free of charge in Jesus Christ, which is this passive or Christian righteousness. If I tried to fulfill the law myself, I could not trust in what I had accomplished, neither could it stand up to the judgment of God. So... I rest only upon the righteousness of Christ... which I do not produce but receive, God the Father freely giving it to us through Jesus Christ."

- Martin Luther

It is extremely easy to lose focus of the righteousness that Christ has earned on our behalf. The demands, busy-ness, and distractions of life makes our vision of life blurry. We need to daily put on the promises of God in the way glasses allow us to focus and see things clearly. In Christ, we are redeemed and we are loved by God. Look at things through a Gospel lens and see things through God's eyes. The scriptures are important, but we read them to know the heart of God. There is a relationship there where He speaks to us and we get to know Him and ourselves better.

2. You Have Christ's Victory Over Sin

Whatever spiritual battle you are dealing with today has already been won.

The Temptation of Jesus

¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

The setting of the wilderness from a Jewish viewpoint is one of chaos and danger. The scarcity of water, unpredictable conditions, spiritual peril, are all symbolized by the desert. Similar to the temptation in the garden in Genesis 3, Jesus is brought in by the Spirit on a different kind of battleground — a dry desolate wasteland. This embodies an "anti-Eden". Scholars say this is the greatest combat the world has ever known: Jesus Christ vs Satan. The battle with our wayward hearts and souls on the line. We are completely powerless on our own to endure any temptations found in the wilderness. If left unabated, our hearts are capable of almost anything because of the damage of sin. The following excerpt of Auschwitz survivor Yehiel De-Nur on why he fainted when being interviewed after the Nuremberg war crime trials speaks to how sinful our hearts have the potential to be:

"No, it was none of these. Rather, as Dinur explained to Wallace, all at once he realized Eichmann was not a godlike officer who had sent so many to their deaths. This Eichmann was an ordinary man. "I was afraid about myself," said Dinur. "I saw that I am capable to do this. I am... exactly like he."

Wallace's subsequent summation of Dinur's terrible discovery - "Eichmann is in all of us" — is a horrifying statement; but it indeed captures the central truth about man's nature. For as a result of the fall, sin is in each of us — not just the susceptibility to sin, but sin itself."

- Kent Hughes commentary from *Who Speaks For God*

Under the right circumstances, the particular settings, the proper motivations, at our weakest moments in the wilderness, we are all capable of unspeakable things. When Adam sinned in the garden, we all fell with him. Sin is very much a reality in all of our lives. Christianity doesn't shy away from why there is pain

and suffering and brokenness in the world, however, it is also clear that sin and brokenness is not a “they” problem. It’s easy for us to blame others, but Scripture is clear it’s a “me” problem. It’s an “us” problem. Apart from Christ we lack the light in the wilderness. The power of sin is powerful, yet this is why Jesus came and conquered Satan. If Jesus were to have failed at any point in the temptations in the wilderness, we would still be stuck in despair, have no hope, and be powerless to temptation in our lives, enslaved by sin and destined to eternal separation from God. Mark highlights the hope that we have as believers, that Jesus is the second Adam, the greater Adam. The one who took on temptation and did not succumb to sin. Jesus is the true and better Israel, as He obeyed perfectly even in the wilderness. Because of our union with Christ, we share the same victory. When, not if, you face temptation, when you’re struggling and failing, we have to cling to the truth that Jesus has given us everything He has. We can look to His victory and know that we too have victory over the sins in front of us. The Gospel frees us to not worry about our own inadequacies but rest in Christ’s victory and sufficiency. It also frees us to seek other people and be honest about our sins and need for Him. We are not called to live in the wilderness alone, but in community to remind one another that Christ’s victory is our victory.

3. The Kingdom of God is at Hand

Repentance and belief in the gospel is lifeblood for God’s people living under God’s reign.

Jesus Begins His Ministry

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

The word gospel was not a religious term at the time, but rather indicative of a life altering event, usually in the form of a royal birth or ascension of a king or a military conquest. For example the word gospel was used to refer to the reign of Caesar Augustus, and so using words like the Son of God (v1) or gospel was dangerous, standing in direct contrast to the imperial good news. Even today, this terminology is a threat to those whose allegiance lies in anything aside from Christ.

The kingdom of God is where we believe that our salvation is completely God’s work, and we live free from guilt and shame because Jesus took it for us. We live as people who aren’t looking for worthiness outside of God but we look to the praise of our Father in Heaven. We live in light of peace and comfort and security because we know that God is with us and will not abandon us. We live free from fears of this world because we know that God is sovereign, His plans will not be thwarted. We live by the sanctifying grace that we know that everything God is doing in our lives is for the purpose of making us more like Jesus. We can hold to the hope that regardless of our trials, tribulations, and sufferings, that scripture says they are not worth comparing to the glory that is the coming of Jesus Christ, our eternal hope that He will renew all things.

"It is easy to use the words faith and repentance, but the things are most difficult to perform. He therefore who makes the worship of God consist in these by no means loosens the reins of discipline, but compels men to the course which they are most afraid to take.

- John Calvin