

# “Time for Repentance”

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.” [ESV]

# HOPE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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**Introduction:** This is a remarkable proclamation. Why is it so brief? After all, this is the Son of God speaking about theology. Shouldn't there be more adjectives and adverbs, more dependent clauses, some compound-complex sentences, some *footnotes*? Let's look first at the setting of the proclamation and then at its simplicity.

## I. Setting

### A. Arrest of John (event)

Locates Jesus' proclamation on an historical timeline and lends authenticity to the account. Mark could have been lying -- couldn't he? This gospel (the earliest) was published when there were still thousands of living witnesses who would have rejected a lie. Accepted into canon . . . under these circumstances . . . tends toward validation.

Mark intentionally correlates arrest of John and beginning of Jesus' public ministry to show that the gospel is proclaimed – and *known* – in adversity and suffering rather than in ease and comfort.<sup>1</sup> The arrest and eventual beheading of righteous John foreshadow the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. Remember: Mark's intent is to portray the person and work of Christ for the benefit of Roman Christians suffering persecution under Nero. An encouragement to those Christians to realize that they were not suffering persecution alone.

### B. In Galilee (place)

Remarkable place to premier the gospel. Insignificant Jewish settler region west of Sea of Galilee. Mark devotes half of his gospel to Galilean ministry. Greatest popular successes here. After death and resurrection, Jesus gathers his dispersed and defeated followers here and recommissions them for ministry. Jerusalem (site for second half of gospel) portrayed beginning around 11.27 as place of unrelieved faithlessness of religious leaders. Thus, though otherwise insignificant, Galilee is a place of promise and opportunity for the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

### C. Immanence of Kingdom (condition)

What is the kingdom of God? First – "kingdom of heaven" is in every significant way equivalent (the same thing/condition) . . . the sovereign rule or reign of God, either in grace or in judgment.<sup>3</sup>

[Reymond, p. 986] Jesus began His public ministry by announcing that "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." Created context for public discourse, and context is critical. To illustrate: Numerous federal legislators during the Obamacare debate – the public discourse – revealed that they did not understand that the Constitution provided the context in which they were working; their efforts were grounded in their imaginations rather than in law. For lack of a context, they became lawbreakers.

<sup>1</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 44 (hereafter "Edw.")

<sup>2</sup> Edw., *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 538

In today's passage and in this particular speech, Jesus did not define what He meant by the "kingdom of God." The absence of definitional "talk" suggests that He assumed – because of OT teaching on the subject – that the idea and its content were familiar to His listeners.

Phrase "kingdom of God" not in actual OT text either. Idea found in frequent references to God as King both of Israel and of whole earth. Millions of words from scholars on the subject of what the kingdom of God would have looked like to a first-century Jew. Here's Reymond's summary of the views of one scholar, Anthony Hoekema (Dutch; Calvin College/Seminary 1960s and 70s):

Seven specific revelational concepts of the 1<sup>st</sup>-century Jew:<sup>4</sup>

1. Expectation of the coming Redeemer (revealed first as the "seed of the woman" in Gen. 3.15) who would in some not completely clear but unique and final way fill the offices/roles of prophet, priest, king, suffering servant and son of man.
2. Anticipation of the kingdom of God when God's rule would be fully experienced, not just by Israel, but by the whole world.
3. Making of a new covenant with Israel by which instrument God would forgive His people of their sins and idolatry.
4. Restoration of Israel from her captivity by hostile nations.
5. Outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh.
6. Approach of the Day of the Lord which would mean judgment on the unbelieving nations and deliverance for the people of God.
7. Creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

So this is not a new conversation, but, still, it's not clear to Jesus' audience when these things would occur or how they would all be related to one another. As Peter tells us in his first letter, "Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look." <sup>1 Pet. 1. 10-12</sup>

Foregoing was the framework – the context – within which Jesus' audience would have heard His proclamation that "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.**"

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<sup>4</sup> Reymond's summary of Anthony Hoekema, p. 988 (scriptural citations for each of the 7 are found on that page)

“‘The time has come.’ The announcement of the kingdom at Jesus’ debut in Galilee is presented by Mark as the definitive moment of history. . . . God has brought the time of prophecy as represented in the quotation of 1:2-3 to a close and has inaugurated the final phase of history. Jesus . . . has submitted himself patiently to the divine timing and waited for the propitious moment, so long prepared for, of which he is the herald. . . . The new and unparalleled possibility presented to humanity in the gospel calls for a unique response. That response is contained in the word ‘repent,’ . . . [which we’ll look at more closely in just a minute and] which demands a decisive change.”<sup>5</sup>

Interim Summary: The setting for Jesus’ proclamation was at a time just after John’s arrest, the location was Galilee and the new spiritual environment was the immanence of the kingdom of God.

Now please consider the simplicity of the proclamation.

## II. Simplicity

### A. Repent<sup>6</sup>

We turn again to Dr. Reymond for help in understanding repentance. He says that it involves three changes with regard to four realities – a change of view (intellect), a change of feeling (emotion) and a change of purpose (will) with respect to God, ourselves, sin and righteousness. [Real life example of believers stunned to discover that God actually cares about the Ten Commandments.] “We acknowledge that we are sinners and that our sin entails personal guilt, defilement and helplessness before God; we sorrow with a ‘godly sorrow’ for the sins we have committed against the holy and just God; and we resolve to seek pardon and cleansing from God through the blood of Christ which alone satisfies the offended justice of God. So in turning from our sins in repentance we turn to Christ in faith for salvation.”<sup>7</sup>

“Repentance (Gk. *metanoein*) is used in the summary description of the proclamation of John (1:4), Jesus (1:15), and the disciples (6:12) and not again in Mark.”<sup>8</sup> Belief, on the other hand, appears frequently in Mark, in both word and concept, and assumes the act of repentance will logically and experientially follow.

WSC 87:<sup>9</sup> *What is repentance unto life?* 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, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

<sup>5</sup> Edw., p. 47

<sup>6</sup> [repent](#) -- late 13c., "to feel regret for sins or crimes," from O.Fr. *repentir* (11c.), from *re-*, intensive prefix, + V.L. *\*penitire* "to regret," from L. *poenitire* "make sorry," from *poena* (see [penal](#)).

<sup>7</sup> Reymond, p. 725

<sup>8</sup> Edw., *loc. cit.* (emphasis added)

<sup>9</sup> Language slightly modernized.

Based on Tim Keller’s teachings: Real repentance is looking underneath your attitudes, actions and words to discover how you’re trying to manipulate God – either by flaunting Him or by following all of the rules so that He *must* reward you. Cf. Matt. 5.27-28

I believe that “a true sense of sin” can rightly include repenting of our repentance.

### B. Believe<sup>10</sup>

“ . . . believe in the gospel” is **4100. πιστεύω pisteuō**; from **4102**; *to believe, entrust*:— “I BELIEVE THIS IS A CHAIR.” “I BELIEVE [SITTING] THIS IS A CHAIR.” You cannot believe in a biblical sense with only your mind. Believing is an act of an incarnate soul.

Consider for a moment how few words Moses wrote about Abraham’s faith in Gen. 15.6: And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. “He believed the LORD.” SUBJECT (HE) – VERB (BELIEVED) – OBJECT (LORD). Less surely is more in this situation.

### C. Gospel

We spent some time during the second sermon in this series (May 16) on the meaning of “gospel” and on just whose gospel it is – more appropriately, what the gospel is “of.” We discovered then that the gospel is an eternal good story of the Son of God. It is understandable only as the completion of something that God began in the history of Israel. “*The* gospel” is not just a set of words. Rather, the gospel is a set of changed relationships. The greatest change is in your relationship to Christ: If you belong to Him, He has placed you both in the eternal good story and in His body.

But what’s this at the end of v. 14 . . . the gospel of *God*? Paul makes numerous references to the gospel of God. Mark’s only such reference. We should understand this phrase to mean the good news *from* God, and it is elaborated in the proclamation of the kingdom of God.

## III. Doctrine

I suggest that the doctrine of this passage – in light of the place of the passage in the entire gospel of Mark – is that Christ had little to say about the kingdom of God, repentance, belief and the gospel and much to incarnate.

## IV. Application

### A. More the man than the words

As we study Mark together in the years ahead, perhaps you, too, will find it remarkable how relatively little Jesus taught – in words – about kingdom, repentance or belief. Perhaps – as Edwards clearly states in the introduction to his commentary<sup>11</sup> – what matters so much more than the words is the Man Himself. Mark’s point is that we are to

<sup>10</sup> In one of his sermons on Psalm 119, Mr. Malone noted that meditating on Christ changes the content of our conversation. I agree. It can also cause us to hear ourselves better. After today, I hope that you will hear believe/belief differently. If “belief” has lived in your head, let it begin to live in your sitting down.

<sup>11</sup> See page 13

follow Jesus the person rather than "just" listen to His words (though surely His words are fully worth listening to).

This point is hard to preach . . . at least it is for me. I'm going to ask for help from two men.

### B. The Fragrance of the Knowledge of Christ

Recently, Mr. Powell passed on to the Session comments published by British Pastor Ian Hamilton, posted on the Banner of Truth web site.<sup>12</sup> I close with an extended quotation from Pastor Hamilton, which seems to me to capture the essence of the Man who made the proclamation in Mark 1.14 – as He lived out that proclamation in the rest of His earthly life *and as we live in union with Him*.

I know that some of you are conscious of spreading everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of Him.<sup>13</sup> If you are not one of those, do you know who the fragrance-bearers are? If you know who they are, do you deliberately "hang out" with them? Those are just two questions I would ask you. I hope that Holy Spirit has brought to mind many questions you want to ask me.

The Hamilton quotation concludes this sermon.

I read some time ago in James Denney's commentary on 2 Corinthians these words:

as Paul moved through the world, all who had eyes to see saw in him not only the power but the sweetness of God's redeeming love. The mighty Victor made manifest through him, not only His might, but His charm, not only His greatness, but His grace.

These are surely striking words. Denney is reflecting on the phrase in 2 Corinthians 2:14, where Paul speaks of God, through his saved people, spreading 'everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.' Just as the sweet smell of burning incense filled Rome when a victorious general returned from battle, so, says Paul, the triumph and truth of the Crucified is proclaimed fragrantly by the lips and lives of Christ's captive people.

That Paul should speak of the 'fragrance' of the knowledge of Christ is both deeply striking and profoundly searching. We are accustomed, and rightly so, to think of the profound importance of gospel truth being proclaimed accurately. Truth is at a discount in our so-called post-modern world. Christians need more than ever today to assert, and to do so passionately, the objective, unassailable truth of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. But when we proclaim the gospel, and when we live out the gospel (the gospel inevitably issues in a transformed, that is commandment-obedient, life), do we always succeed in manifesting it fragrantly? Or, is the truth that the gospel's fragrance, sweetness, winsomeness, charm and attractiveness, is the very thing that is most easily and often missing?

We all surely have known the compelling appeal and power of a sermon, a life, that has radiated the 'fragrance of the knowledge of Christ.' The truth has come to us, not coldly or clinically, but clothed in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have heard the dark and solemn truths of sin and righteousness and judgement; but we heard them come from lives which expressed the fragrance of the 'Rose of Sharon'. The truth was clothed with grace and winsomeness. Why is it

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<sup>12</sup> The essay is at [http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article\\_detail.php?1779](http://www.banneroftruth.org/pages/articles/article_detail.php?1779)

<sup>13</sup> And others of you unconsciously spread the fragrance.

then, that Reformed Christians, Calvinists if you will, are so often accused of being cold and clinical, 'the frozen chosen'?

The answer could well be, of course, that our fellow Christians are simply reacting against our unyielding commitment to let God be God, and to reverence him who is a 'consuming fire.' But the answer could also be that we have been guilty of divorcing the truth of Christ from union with Christ. Let me explain. In 2 Corinthians 2:15, Paul speaks of God leading 'us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spread(ing) everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.' Everything in the Christian life flows from our union with the Lord Jesus Christ. All the saving and sanctifying blessings we enjoy in the gospel, come to us in union with Christ. He is the vine, we are the branches. The sap of his life, by the Holy Spirit, flows through the believer's life. This is why Paul can write of the 'fruit of the Spirit' (see *Gal. 5:22-23*), and give us a description of the life of the Saviour, with all its grace, winsomeness and charm. If gospel truth is not clothed then with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, is it really 'gospel' ('good news') truth? This in no sense means that gospel truth will never be stern or searchingly humbling. But it does mean that we will speak it and live it as men and women humbled by its grace, filled with its joy, excited by its possibilities, harnessed to the One who is 'full of grace and truth'.

James Denney was not over-stating the point when he wrote: 'We miss what is most characteristic in the knowledge of God if we miss this. We leave out that very element in the Evangel which makes it evangelic, and gives it its power to subdue and enchain the souls of men.' How 'fragrantly' do our lives and our sermons commend the Saviour? He is the 'Rose of Sharon'.

Amen.