

Repent and Believe in the Good News

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Y. Joe Kim

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” ¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. ¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵ and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:9-15).

1. Driving on One Way Street

Years ago, I took a trip to Oklahoma City to attend a conference. It was my first time visiting the city and I wasn't sure how to get to the conference. Soon, a police car followed me. He told me I was going the wrong way on an one-way street.

He told me to follow him. He guided me to the church where the conference was held. If the police officer hadn't stopped me, I could have gotten into a big accident.

2. Who is the Author of Mark's Gospel?

Today's sermon title is from verse 15: “**Repent and Believe in the good news.**” Just like my experience with the police, the Gospel of Mark gives us a warning to go in the right direction.

The author of Mark's Gospel is traditionally believed to be Mark the Evangelist. Mark's Gospel is believed to have been the first Gospel ever written. Was Mark one of Jesus' disciples? No, he was not. Then why do you think he became the first Gospel writer? It seems that something happened to Mark, which drove him to write the Gospel.

The Bible does not tell us much about Mark. According to the Book of Acts, Mark was also called John (12:12). It is believed that Mark was a companion of the Apostle Peter.

How did Mark meet Peter? When Peter escaped from prison and retreated to a house of Christians, Peter stayed at the house of Mary, Mark's mother. Likely at the time, Mark learned a lot about Jesus' life and ministry from Peter.

Mark had a confidence that Jesus was the true Son of God and the Messiah. That's why Mark writes in the beginning of the Gospel, "***The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God***" (1:1). Mark had a passion for spreading the good news of Jesus to all the people in the world.

3. The Time for the Kingdom of God

Today's passage Mark 1:9-15 talks about Jesus' baptism, his temptation, and his preaching and ministry. I would like to focus on verse 15, "***the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.***" Jesus is saying, God's appointed time for the coming of the Messiah is fulfilled in accordance with God's plan.

And God's power and authority would be revealed through Jesus. Jesus reminds us what Isaiah says, "***How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns"***" (52:7). Jesus would fulfill the role of the messenger. As Isaiah says, Jesus would bring peace, good news and salvation to God's people.

4. Repent and Believe in Good News

After that Jesus says, "***Repent and believe in the good news.***" Why does Mark say that Jesus began his ministry by saying, "repent and believe in the good news"? It was because Christians in Rome worshipped many gods such as Jupiter, Juno, Minerva and Mars. The people believed the very success of the Roman Empire proved that the Romans worshiped their gods properly. Mark wanted the Romans to accept Jesus as their savior.

What does it mean to repent? Repent in Greek is "metanoeo." This term is the combination of two words: "meta" and "noeo." Meta means "with" or "together." "Noeo" means "understand" or "perceive." So metanoeo means "be with your understanding" or "change your understanding." "Repent" is like "to turn around and go towards a different direction." This is like to turn around when you notice you are going in the wrong direction.

Mark says to the Roman Christians that worshipping many gods would not bring them prosperity or wealth or happiness. The people needed to turn away from their misunderstanding the objects that they placed their trust in. Mark tells the people that they need to turn to the Lord

with all their hearts and believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah.

What does “believe in the good news” mean? “Believe” in the passage means to commit oneself wholeheartedly to an object of faith. “The good news” means the fulfillment of time and the coming of God’s rule into history. “Believe in the good news” means to trust in Jesus as the Messiah as the Son of God. Jesus would reign God’s world and Mark wants the Romans to accept Jesus as the messenger.

5. Discipleship

“**Repent and believe in the good news**” is the invitation from Jesus for a new life with God’s purpose. It is a spiritual birth and the beginning of a spiritual journey with the Lord. The question is, do we need repent and believe in the good news again and again after we became followers of Jesus?

1 John 1 says, “**If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**” (verse 8). By confessing our sins and believing in the good news we reconfirm our relationship with Jesus, and we deepen our understanding of repentance and the meaning of faith.

Over time, the followers of Jesus become mature in understanding God’s purpose and mission. In Luke 9:23, Jesus says to the disciples, “**If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.**”

Jesus’ life journey makes us revisit why we decided to follow Jesus. Each one might have different reasons to follow Jesus. Most people would expect from Jesus wonderful gifts such as forgiveness, salvation, eternal life, joy, peace, health, prosperity, happiness, and success. But some people experience quite the opposite like persecution and martyrdom. The lives of Jesus and the disciples teach us that we are called to be Jesus’ disciples to fulfill God’s purpose. God’s purpose for us is not a self-centered life.

These days many people are interested in vaccination. However, vaccination can’t be more important than our trust in Jesus. Vaccination does not provide us what Jesus does. I am not discouraging vaccination but want to remind us that it does not give us forgiveness, salvation, redemption, and eternal life.

6. The Discipline of Discipleship

The disciples are those who have been taught or trained. Without discipline, we can't be disciples. Lent is the time to be trained and to grow our faith and live with the sense of purpose.

7. We will be Renewed Daily

For the past two months Christine and I really enjoyed spending time with our grandson Caleb. For 2 months he grew a lot physically and mentally.

What about us? Are we just two months older than last year? But Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4, "***So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day***" (4:16). We do not know what kind of challenges we might face during Lent and after Lent. But we will never give up because we will be renewed daily. When we celebrate Easter, I pray that all of us are able to say that in our spiritual journey during Lent God has been with us and strengthening us every day. I pray that all of us have passion that Mark had for the Gospel. Amen.