



grow. pray. study.

**March 5, 2023, *The Kingdom of God is at Hand; Repent!***

Scripture: Mark 1:14-15

**Repent—“change your hearts and lives”**

**MONDAY 3.6.23 Mark 1:4, 14-15**

The gospels used the Greek word *metanoia* for both John the Baptist's and Jesus' message. It meant literally “turn around, change direction.” It's most often translated as “repent”—the *Common English Bible* rendered it as “change your hearts and lives.” In any language, Jesus called (and calls) people, not to a one-time feeling, but to a serious, continual choice to live his way. Jesus linked that to God's “kingdom” arriving, based on passages like [Psalm 99:1-5](#) that saw God as the true king overall.

- The Old Testament prophet Joel called the people of his day to change direction (cf. [Joel 2:12-13](#)). “Joel urges people to make sincere and lasting changes and not simply outward signs.” \* That was also a key to the message Jesus, John the Baptist and the apostles preached. In your experience, what's the difference between simply trying to sound sorry and genuinely choosing to change? What are some of the chief ways Jesus has led you to change your heart and life?
- Scholar N. T. Wright described the people who first heard John's and Jesus' preaching: “Many had wanted a Messiah to lead them against the Romans, but they weren't anticipating a prophet telling them to repent.... It was time to turn around and go the right way (that's what ‘repentance’ means). It was time to stop dreaming and wake up to God's reality.” \*\* In what ways does honoring God as king lead you to let God, not your own wishes, direct your life?

**Prayer:** Lord God, if I try to fool myself (or you) with fine words while my heart remains unchanged, you see right through me. By your Spirit, move me to yearn for a new heart and a faithful spirit deep inside me. Amen.

\* J. Andrew Dearman, study note on Joel 2:13 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 1449 OT.

\*\* Wright, N. T., *Mark for Everyone* (New Testament for Everyone) (p. 1). SPCK. Kindle Edition.

## The unexpected kingdom

### TUESDAY 3.7.23 Matthew 11:2-5

Even John the Baptist, Jesus' faithful forerunner, later wondered if he'd been right to point people to Jesus. "The Gospels tell of...John the Baptist, then in prison, [asking] whether Jesus was really the expected Messiah.... Jesus was not doing what John thought the Messiah would do: bring down God's judgment on the wicked and unrepentant." \* It seems that even John, at that point, wanted Jesus' kingdom to require other people (but not him) to change their thinking and actions.

- Jesus was not the kind of Messiah John expected (cf. [Luke 3:17](#)). To answer John's question, Jesus pointed to parts of the prophet Isaiah's message that many (then and now) ignored. "Jesus' reply.... was inviting John to recognize that the things that were happening in Jesus' ministry were the sorts of things the prophet said would accompany God's coming to rule. \* Do you ever struggle to accept God's ways, rather than demanding what you wish God would do?"
- Scholar N. T. Wright said, "Just as wicked people don't like the message of judgment, because they think (rightly) that it's aimed at them, so sometimes good people don't like the message of mercy, because they think (wrongly) that people are going to get away with wickedness." \*\* To what extent can you empathize with John's uneasiness about Jesus' merciful words and actions? Who are the people Jesus accepts and shows mercy to today that might make you nervous?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, at times I can identify with your struggling forerunner. Thank you that even when I'm filled with questions, I always find in you the merciful person who truly was "the one." Amen.

\* Bauckham, Richard. *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction* (Very Short Introductions) (pp. 41-42). OUP Oxford. Kindle Edition.

\*\* N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1–15*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 127.

## What Jesus' "kingdom" is like

### WEDNESDAY 3.8.23 Matthew 13:31-33, 44-46

Jesus' parables were never just fun stories—they creatively called his hearers to turn around and change their lives to follow him. (We'll study the parables in more depth in the third week of this series.) Using the tiny mustard seed as an illustration, Jesus showed that "the glorious future kingdom was already active in a hidden way in Jesus' ministry." \* From humble yeast to fabulous treasure, Jesus' stories invited people to "trade in" their old way of life for what he offered.

- Yeast—really? "The whole point of the parable lies in one thing—the transforming power of the leaven. Leaven changed the character of a whole baking.... The introduction of the leaven causes a transformation in the dough, and the coming of the Kingdom causes a transformation in life." \*\* In what ways has your choice to be a citizen of Jesus' kingdom transformed your life? In what parts of your life is the yeast at work now leading you to positive change?
- These stories made a bold claim. "The gospel of the kingdom isn't a pleasant religious idea that you might like to explore sometime when you've got an hour or two to spare.... It's like a fabulous hoard of treasure, yours for the taking—if you'll sell everything else to buy the field where it's hidden." \*\*\* In what ways has Jesus called you to give up any ideas or activities you valued to gain Jesus' kingdom? Has it been worth it?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, make me a "yeasty" Christian who can change the world around me for the good. Make me willing to give up anything else to receive your gift of eternal life. Amen.

\* NIV, *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, eBook (Kindle Locations 219928-219930). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

\*\* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 2 Chapters 11–28 (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 79.

\*\*\* N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1–15*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 177.

## **Jesus' kingdom: out of this world**

### **THURSDAY 3.9.23 John 18:33-37, 19:7-12**

Pontius Pilate, a hardened Roman bureaucrat, found himself facing a prisoner unlike any he had ever met. He'd seen lots of anger and defiance, but this calm sense that it was really Jesus, not Pilate, who had the ultimate authority—no, he'd never seen that. Jaded as he was, he even wondered if something otherworldly was at work, and asked Jesus, "Where do you come from?" (John 19:9)

- British scholar William Barclay wrote of John 18, "[Jesus] makes it quite clear that he claims to be a king and equally clear that his kingdom is not based on force but is a kingdom in the hearts of men. He would never deny that he aimed at conquest, but it was the conquest of love." \* To Pilate, the Jewish leaders, and at times even to his disciples, Jesus' aim looked naïve and unrealistic. Did Jesus accomplish "the conquest of love" in our world? Has he conquered your heart?
- To human eyes, it seemed simple: Pilate stood for all of Rome's power and "legal" authority. Yet it wasn't that simple. "What's true of Jesus himself is equally true of his kingdom: it's not from this world, but from above (see [John 8:23](#)).... *Authority*: echoes John 10:18, 'I have the right [authority] to give it up, and I have the right [authority] to take it up again.' Jesus' claim and Pilate's are on a collision course." \*\* How do you accept or resist Jesus' life-changing authority in your life?

**Prayer:** Lord of all, you came to testify to the truth, including the truth about who you are and where you came from. I believe you, and I worship and follow you. Amen.

\* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of John—Volume 2 Chapters 8–21 (Revised Edition)*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, page 244.

\*\* J. Ramsey Michaels, study notes on John 18:36 and 19:10 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, pp. 207-208 NT.

## Jesus' call to repent is for all of us

### FRIDAY 3.10.23 Luke 5:27-32, 18:9-14

As we study Jesus' message of repentance, the great spiritual hazard is the idea (conscious or subconscious) that “those bad people need to repent, but I don’t—I’m a good person.” As today’s readings show, Jesus never encouraged or accepted any version of that idea. It probably shocked many of his hearers to think that that awful tax collector (who worked corruptly with the Romans) went home right with God, and the Pharisee (“I’m not like everyone else”) didn’t.

- The apostle Paul had, at one point, been like the Pharisee in Jesus' story (cf. [Philippians 3:4-7](#)). But he trusted Jesus' teaching about repentance so fully that, when he sent his message of good news to Roman Christians he'd never met, he said, “There’s no distinction. All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace” (Romans 3:22-24). What helps you remember that you need repentance as a regular rhythm in your spiritual life?
- Luke made sure his story reflected the irony of the Pharisees grumbling about Jesus eating with “sinners.” “The Pharisees refer here to people, like the tax collectors, whom they think disobey God’s laws all the time. But in Luke, Jesus can’t avoid eating with sinners, since all, including Pharisees, are sinners.... He came *to call everyone to change*.” \* What are some of the most significant, challenging ways in which Jesus has called, and is calling, you to change?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, this isn’t abstract, but personal. I put my person, my “self,” on the line as a sinner who chooses to be your repentant follower. Thank you for calling me as you did Levi the tax collector. Amen.

\* Richard B. Vinson, study notes on Luke 5:30-32 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 117 NT.

## Jesus sent his followers to carry on the message

### SATURDAY 3.11.23 Luke 24:44-49

The resurrected Jesus taught his followers to reflect on the big picture of Israel’s history from Moses to the Psalms, to see that in the Christ (anointed one) there is salvation and justice. The link between repentance and becoming a member of God’s kingdom was there just as it had been at the start of his ministry. But what Jesus shared was far more than just information. It was a job description—he sent them with orders to share his message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. “You are witnesses,” he said, promising that God’s power would help them spread his message to all nations.

- Closed minds had kept Jerusalem’s leaders from accepting Jesus. The resurrection called on even Jesus' followers to rethink some of their assumptions. In verse 45, Luke used a great phrase: “He opened their minds to understand the scriptures.” Have you ever experienced this kind of “opening” in your Bible study, worship, or prayer? How can you create space for Jesus to open your mind to understand him and his message more fully? Your personal story of a changed heart and life is powerful for the non-religious and nominally religious people you interact with wherever you live, work or play. You, like the disciples, are a witness to God’s redemptive work through Jesus Christ. In what ways can you share your personal story of a changed heart and life with those around you?

**Prayer:** God, keep me alert for chances to faithfully share your story. Give me courage when afraid, confidence when unsure, passion when indifferent. Help me share my personal story of a changed heart and life. Amen.

