

Four key truths

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[0 : 0 0] We come by with you to our reading that we took in Mark's Gospel, chapter 6. And again, rather than just choose one particular small part of the chapter, I would like to have an overview of the whole chapter and see what themes Mark wishes us to take from them, at least some of them, and in presenting Jesus to recognise the challenges and the message of Jesus for ourselves from this Holy Spirit-inspired Gospel.

And there are four words that I would pick out as key words in this chapter and words that are important for us spiritually as we seek to learn from God's Word.

And the first of these is repentance, because repentance is an important part of the various stories that come across in this chapter. And in verse 12 we're told that the disciples were sent out by Jesus and that Jesus told them to preach and that they preached that men should repent.

We're told that in verse 12. Now we also know, not only from there, but generally speaking, from the preaching of Jesus, there was this element of repentance. Jesus said in Luke 5, I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

That is the call of Jesus and it continues to be. That he's calling people to repentance. So no, it was part of, and it had to be part of the preaching of John, John the Baptist.

[1 : 3 1] We see John here preaching to Herod. And Herod, or it's recounted as we look back on the story, we have the account of Herod being preached to by John. And he liked to hear him preach.

He was challenged by it. But again, he was made uneasy by it. His conscience was ruffled by John who told him that he had to repent of his lifestyle and of his behaviour because he was in an adulterous relationship with his brother's wife Herodias.

And that was part of John's message, the message of repentance. And that message remains an integral and important part of the message of the gospel today.

It remains part of the Christian message, the call to repentance. Now in the same way that John preached rebukingly, as it were, against Herod, or to Herod.

So repentance and the preaching or the message of repentance includes this element of rebuke. Not in a judgmental way, and hopefully never in a censorious way, or in a self-righteous way.

[2 : 3 4] But as God's word is faithfully spoken of and preached, there must be tender and compassionate and gentle, but also firm rebuke.

There must be an exposing of sin. There must be an exposing of what is wrong before people will ever seek out what is right. And it has to be said. There must be this element where we recognise and know in our own witnessing and in the preaching that there must be this repentant sense of rebuke given from the pulpit.

We are unable and we are not allowed to dilute the standards of God's word to fit in with whatever happens to be acceptable or unacceptable in the society in which we live.

If we leave people within the context of the preaching, if we leave them within their sins, if we leave them unrebuked or untouched or unmoved, if we don't focus on people's needs for repentance, then people, if they are unsaved, will remain condemned, will remain out of Christ.

It is not the righteous, that is those who think that they're righteous, who need salvation, but those who are sinners. And so the gospel preaching must always include, the message must always include this element of bringing out people's needs.

[3 : 57] And I as a preacher can be concerned just to say nice things all the time from the pulpit. Or I can't be concerned just to be popular from the pulpit by what I say and by what is preached.

I can't be afraid of people moving or taking the huff when the message of sin is preached and the message of the gospel is preached because the gospel speaks about this needful rebuke, like Herod needed to be spoken to by John.

And the message must be faithfully preached. I have to stand before Jesus Christ. And if there are people here who are not told the way of salvation, and if there are people here who are not told about the way of sin and about the need for repentance, then I am responsible for your soul.

And I love you, as well as being responsible for your soul. And people who love other people, speak to them the truth of God's word. And if you are out of Christ, if you are deliberately sinning, if you are living a life of unbelief, then you will be lost.

And you will be judged eternally. And it's not okay. And it's not alright that everything is good and popular and kind and nice and pleasant and tickling the ears. There must be this message where we expose God's word.

[5 : 19] And we looked at it a few weeks ago with the works of the flesh. And these are things that are the fruit of unbelief, the fruit of our natural hearts. And if that's the way we're living, then we're in severe danger, spiritually speaking.

And there is this call for repentance. There is this call to come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness. There is this call to change your lifestyle, to look, to examine it in God's word, and see if there's anything that's displeasing to him.

And to come back to Jesus Christ. Because along with that gentle or tender, hopefully, there is also this call to repentance. There is this tremendous call to repentance.

It's part of the preaching of the disciples as they went out calling people that men should repent. And it's always characterized the work of God's Holy Spirit.

It's always characterized the hunger for God in our lives as if we are willing to respond to the call of Jesus to repent. Maybe one of the great missing characteristics of modern Western Christianity is this need to repent.

[6 : 26] Is it fair to even throw out the question, do Christians repent anymore? Or is that something now that isn't done? Because nowadays nobody's wrong. We're all just different.

And we're all of different understandings. But nobody needs to repent. We just see things in a different way. But if there's no repentance, then it's easy salvation and it's easy faith.

There's no need to change to become more like Jesus. There's no need for humility, to recognize the wrong. There's no need for the Holy Spirit because we know that the Spirit's work is to produce fruit.

We know what John says in Matthew 3, he said, produce fruit in keeping with repentance. We bear fruit for Christ when we are pruned and when we are disciplined and when we are repentant.

So if there is no repentance, there is no fruit and there is no change, there's no humility. So you know there's something else, there's no discomfort. And maybe that's why we're so increasingly unwilling to repent.

[7 : 31] Because repentance involves discomfort. It involves challenge. It involves exposing what we're like. It involves a conscience that is touched and moved.

But if there's no repentance, no change, no humility, no need for the Spirit, no need for God, there's no need for the work of God's power. And when we are unrepentant, then God is not in our lives.

Because repentance is a move, a recognition of God, His character. His unchanging character, despite the changing world in which we live. Recognition of His holiness.

Recognition of His own opinion of sin. There will be no unrepentant people in heaven. Whatever else we are, whatever else we believe, whatever else we claim close to, there will be no unrepentant people in heaven.

The pattern of belief, the pattern of salvation, is that we are seeking pardon, that we forsake our sins, that we grieve over them, and we repent of them, and we move on.

[8 : 37] That is the biblical pattern. And it is the pattern that is set down for us in this chapter, through the preaching of John, and also through the preaching of the disciples. Repentance is one word, key word.

Another key word in this chapter begins with R as well, and that is rejection. Rejection is an important word in this chapter. Because the chapter starts out with Jesus in his own hometown.

And the people knew him there so well. They knew who he was. They knew his brothers. They knew his sisters. They knew his work. Maybe some of them had some of his work in their homes, because he was a carpenter. Maybe he had done work and jobs in their houses.

He was non-roll, and he was familiar. And they rejected him. They took offense at him. They recognized his teaching, as being powerful and different. But they rejected him.

They were offended at him because of their familiarity. And then you know Herodias, the wife of Herod's brother, she also rejected John and the message of the gospel.

[9 : 38] Herod himself, he rejected it. He liked it. He enjoyed listening to John. But there was a choice between giving up with adulterous relationships and following the way of faith, and he chose the former.

He rejected the way of the gospel. His conscience was touched, but he was unmoved enough to change. And the result was he hardened himself into sin, and got involved in parties and drunkenness, and made a rash and foolish promise in a drunken stupor.

And it led to the loss of John the Baptist's life, they were being beheaded. And an action of great regret, I would think, inherited life, suffering by his response to the coming of Jesus.

They thought, I know, John the Baptist, come back and risen from the dead. And we also know that rejection was part of the disciples' work, because Jesus says to them, when you go out, you'll have this great miraculous power, you'll preach repentance, but in some towns, people will have nothing to do with you, they'll kick you out of the village gates.

Well, when that happens, when you're rejected, he says, just brush the dust off your feet, as a symbol of what they've rejected, and what it means. So rejection is very much part of this chapter, and rejection continues to be very much part of what happens when the gospel is preached, and what happens when Jesus is presented to your soul.

[11 : 01] And I wonder if today the message of Jesus, and Jesus himself, is just altogether too familiar for you. You've known it from whenever you've been born, and you think, you know, Jesus just as if he was your next door neighbour, just like they did in his own hometown.

And there is truth in the concept, and I don't know where it comes from, if it's from the Bible or not, it may be from Proverbs somewhere, that familiarity breeds contempt. That's sometimes the truth. And it's certainly true with Jesus.

That familiarity with the gospel cry, and the gospel message, and the gospel challenge, can be so ordinary, so often preached, so caged in the same language, that there is no interest, and no wonder, and no desire, and no concern, and that we take offence at the gospel, and we reject the gospel.

Maybe we see things differently. Maybe we say, well, I can't believe in this guy preaching, and asking me to come to Christ, but if I could see Jesus, if I could see his miracles, if I could see what he could do, then I would believe.

But you see, the problem isn't one for you. It's not a problem of proof. The people who had grown up with Jesus had seen him as a perfect child, the incarnate son of God.

[12 : 10] They'd seen him make no mistakes, and then inherited his teaching, and they'd seen his miracles, and they still didn't believe. The problem isn't one of proof for us. The problem is one of heart. It's the fact that we don't want to believe.

We don't want to change our will. We take offence at his claims. We take offence at the charges. We take offence at his character, and we remain as we are. He's too familiar, and the message is too ordinary.

Yet that unbelief is a terrible place to be. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Have you today not believed in the name of God's one and only Son? Not intellectually, but through the heart being given and surrendered over to him, through confession of sin, and through following him as Lord and Saviour.

Because if we don't do that, if we don't follow, there will be a time when Jesus will brush the dust of us off his feet. And there is a cost to our unbelief. And that is what I want to get a first.

[13 : 16] Unbelief is an option for you. No doubt. Unbelief is an option. But it's not an option without cost. Your continued and repeated rejection of the personal pleas of Jesus for your heart is not without cost.

To keep him with contempt, or to disbelieve, or to keep off the gospel for a later time, is not something that happens without a cost to your own soul, and without being in grave, mortal, and immortal danger.

You can't just leave it off till another time, because the other time might not come. Can I ask you to consider maybe if there was a young couple, and the guy wasn't very good looking at all.

The girl was beautiful, absolutely, stunningly good looking. They weren't, and I said they weren't going out with each other. What if that girl went to the guy and said, oh, he's just an ordinary kind of wee lad.

And she said, I would really love to marry you. And I would love to be your wife. And I love you. Now, she was a kind of a wee squirt of a bloke.

[14 : 25] And then he said, no. Not at all. You know, she might have been the envy of everyone in the whole place. I could have taken a pic of any of the blokes in the whole community indeed anywhere.

And this wee guy says, no. No, I'm going to play the field for a few years. I'm going to see anyone I can. I'm going to try and go out with any girl that will have me. And I just want to be free and single. And maybe in a few years' time, when I'm a bit older, and when everyone said no to me, or when I've cried and nobody's stayed with me as a friend or a partner, I'll maybe come back to you when I'm old and I need someone to make my meals and I need someone to look after me.

I'll come back to you then. Then she'll let me to wait. So that's just a stupid human example. But that's what we say with Jesus so often. Jesus is the lover of our soul.

But he died on the cross for us. And he offers salvation and we say, no thanks, not just now Jesus. I want to play the field first. I want to go on in sin. I'm young. I'm energetic.

I'll come to you when I'm old and I'm dying because I'll need you then because I'm going to go to hell then. I'll come when I've got a fag end of my life. The very end, the very worst part. I'll come to you then as an insurance policy but not just now.

[15 : 35] And here he is. He's the beautiful saviour. He's the perfect one. And we choose to live trash lives without him and to do the illogical and the stupid rather than follow and be surrounded and be filled with his glorious love which enables us to live in this life and for eternity.

Jesus is too familiar to. But we just reject him. It's a terrible judgment if we reject him. And we have no guarantee of being able to accept him when we're old and before we die.

And in that same way I would encourage each of us not to be like Herod. Because Herod was someone who stifled his conscience. He was attracted by the message. He knew it was right. There's no doubt he knew it was right.

John the Baptist he knew as a just and right man and he knew the gospel that he preached was the right gospel. But he stifled his conscience because he wanted to keep and live in this adulterous relationship and he wasn't willing to pay the price to carry his cross to repent of his sins.

Don't choose sin over the gospel. And that choice remains for every single one of us whether we're believers or not. Every day we're asked to make a choice between following Christ or choosing sin either as unbelievers or as believers.

[16 : 53] That choice is there for us all. But if we choose sin if we know the gospel is right and if we've been touched by the love of Jesus but we deliberately choose to go against him then we'll be forced into being foolish to quieten our conscience.

You see the stupid and foolish thing that Herod did. He got drunk and he had a party and he made a stupid promise when that girl danced in front of him and it meant the end of John the Baptist's life and that was the decision he regretted.

And in order to quieten our conscience we will find ourselves going headlong into sin. That is the only alternative. When we reject Jesus Christ we can't handle that rejection.

We don't like to hear our conscience bringing us up and reminding us of what was done and so we go headlong into sinful living and sinful behaviour in order to stifle our conscience in order to quieten the voice of God.

We're often as Christians tempted to take one of two roads and we're tempted by sin we're tempted by the grass seeming to be greener than the other side. We're tempted to rebel we're tempted to reject and when we make that choice when we choose not to go with Christ as Christians then we find that we have to stifle our conscience we have to stifle the spirit in us.

[18 : 06] So what do we do as Christians? We close the Bible we stop going to church we cross the road so that we don't speak to Christians we ignore fellowships because our conscience has to be stifled.

We engage in more and more outrageous sinful behaviour to keep our conscience quiet but it leads only to sadness. You see the life of rejection while it has its own attractions temporarily it's not a life of happiness.

So Herod wasn't a happy man he's a man that is twisted he's somebody that's burdened down with guilt and with a feeling of misery he's tortured by his own decisions he's not a picture of a light and refreshed and easy kind of living guy.

Well regret unhappiness misery guilt that is what we choose we choose sin before Christ rejection it's not a good way it's not a happy way especially when you know the gospel I'm not speaking about those who are ignorant of the truth who have never had the gospel presented you have had the gospel presented and pled to you hundreds of times and if you choose to reject then you go down the way of Herod and the dust will be washed off the fear of Christ to choose that way but the third word that is significant in this chapter is companionship because in verse 7 we're told that Jesus sent the disciples out two by two and there's just one or two other things about companionship that I want to just highlight very briefly and we know in Hebrews as well that we are to spur one another on towards love and good deeds do not give up the meeting of together encourage one another and we have this great picture of this companionship companionship the disciples being sent out together they needed each other they needed their own correction they needed their own encouragement they needed to spur one another on they needed to up build one another ministers they need support and encouragement workers elders

Sunday school workers all the people in all the different ways that are engaged in the work of this congregation they need to go out together not just in the classes they teach or the work they do but they need to get together and pray with one another encourage one another build up one another correct one another God's way is iron sharpens iron he sent the disciples not out as individuals he sent them out two by two because the way of the trust is the way of companionship we have the companionship of our fellow believers and in the work that we seek to do please don't expect just one person to do it and don't leave it up to others others they do and you need others in this work of the gospel he sends them out two by two but there's another companionship and that's from verse 42 onwards the great story the miracle of Jesus walking on the water and there's a great companionship there in Jesus and what he has done he is at the side and he sees his own disciples toiling in the water in this great storm and he walks on the water to meet them he is their companion he's their friend and he comes to them especially in their need and he speaks words of comfort to them be of good cheer and verse 50 it is I be not afraid that is the companionship again of the gospel not just one another but more importantly with Jesus the companionship of being with Jesus to be a Christian is to enjoy the companionship of Jehovah God the companionship of Jesus with us in our weakness with us in our struggles in the storms in the troubles as well as the good things with his own miraculous healing power with his own strength with his own glory again we have the passage peppered with miracles to remind us that God isn't an impotent small and useless

[21 : 53] God but he is this glorious meek saviour we saw last week meekness power contained us or channeled and it's channeled for us in our own lives power is channeled he's our companion but there's also another companionship and it's maybe slightly different twisting it a wee bit but it's power and prayer going together in verse 46 after Jesus had done the great miraculous powerful work of the bread and the fishes feeding the 5,000 we're told that straightway after he had sent the disciples away he departed into a mountain to pray and again and again in the gospels there's this companionship where God's power is revealed through Jesus' prayer and that Jesus needed to pray God's power into his own life and he again a miracle to do shortly after that and the power of God at work and the prayer of Jesus being made went together they were companions just as much as the prayerlessness and the faithlessness in Jesus' hometown meant that Jesus could do no mighty works there no prayer no power at the beginning of the chapter prayer surrounding the works of prayer at the end of the chapter that is a great companionship that we must learn and know in an ongoing way in Christ not only are we saved from hell but we are empowered for living if we have no faith then there is no power of God at work no prayer no power what is the answer to your weakness and feeling of helplessness lostness and a longing for God to work in our community power

God goes along with prayer and this unfortunate pleading out to God we can't complain about being spiritually powerless and weak and failing if we never pray God chooses to use praying people and we will never know blessings and power in our lives and victory over sins and rejection of temptation if we never pray so we are to pray and as a congregation there is prayer and if there are specific people you long for to be saved pray for them pray for them by name mention them to God plead before the throne call down his power and lastly and very briefly we have seen in this chapter the words repentance and rejection companionship and also we see compassion in verse 34 Jesus when he looks at the crowd he has been very busy he has not had time to eat with his disciples at all and yet when he sees all the people coming towards him he is moved with compassion towards them because they were the sheep not having a shepherd and he began to teach them compassion for

Jesus the compassion of Jesus for the crowd and then later at the end of the chapter the compassion of the people for their sick and ill friends and bringing them to Jesus for healing this is what Jesus continually reveals himself to be you are a Christian Jesus has looked on you with compassion and he's seeing you like a sheep without a shepherd wandering about lost alone needing to be led and that's how he looks upon you as an unbeliever with compassion longing for you to come into his fold into his family to accept him by faith to become a child of his because he's compassionate he doesn't like seeing his own creation his own people wandering in the dark sinning condemned and lost and if we have to be like Jesus then we have to be compassionate compassionate for each other but also compassionate for those who are unsaved not careless over them not unconcerned but looking at them as if they're sheep without a shepherd nobody to lead them nobody to teach them nobody to save them from the wild animals we must have compassion on the lost and a longing to bring them in and we show that compassion for their condition by bringing them to

Jesus Christ for healing just as we did at the end of this chapter our work as Christians is not to do our own thing but it is to be ambassadors is to be telling is to be sharing that is where our ambition is to lie in bringing people to the healing power of Jesus and to the love of Jesus and to the compassion of Jesus that we have experienced as people our ambition is to be soul winner he who wins souls is wise we're to long for people to be snatched from the gates and jaws of hell and enable them to say as we are able to say the Lord is my shepherd you sing these words glibly but can you say it today the Lord is your shepherd Jesus had compassion and he taught them many things so we teach people speak to them people you're alongside the people that you know that I can never reach the people that are exclusively yours the Lord can be their shepherd also compassion companionship rejection and repentance

[28 : 23] Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen