

Fringe Benefits_Wk1_The Benefit of Changed Direction

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Scripture: Mark 1:1-8; 14-20

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We're starting a brand new series today and to introduce it I'm going to tell you a story based on true events, but all details of my story are being altered:

I knew a man who was a very hard working person. Maybe he worked too hard at times, but nonetheless, his work ethic was well known. He was very skilled at his job and he was respected for the quality of work that he would do. This man would often be asked to do work for a wide variety of people from a fairly large geographical area. Because of the kind of work that he did, his clientele weren't always capable of paying him with cash or a check. Often he would barter with his customers and essentially trade his time and labor for something of value that a customer would have.

There isn't anything wrong with that - it used to be and may still be a common practice.

But often, because of his knowledge and familiarity with what would be considered to be high quality equipment within his industry, he was always looking for a deal to expand his own assortment of tools and implements. And sometimes, because he found a great deal, he would try to get an even better deal. If something of high quality was already being offered at an exceptionally low price, he would see if he could get a person to go even lower.

Just as an example: Let's say that while working for a client he saw within a bookshelf, enclosed behind glass, a first edition of...

1. Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone by J.K. Rowling

The first edition of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is the only book in the series that credits 'Joanne Rowling' as its author with a print line number that reads '10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1'. First editions can fetch about £30,000 to £45,000 at auction, depending on its condition.

The fee for the work that he did only amounted to around \$500, but combined with the fact that his client couldn't pay cash nor did they know the value of what they had in their bookshelf, he might have asked to have what was of far greater worth than the work that he completed.

He was getting something of exceedingly higher value than the work that he completed. It wasn't that he didn't do the work, or do a good job with the project, it's just that he was trying to get a higher benefit than what the job was worth.

Now, some of you are feeling attacked right now. What's wrong with working a deal?

To some extent, there's nothing wrong with it. But there is a point where you cross the line between working a deal and taking advantage of someone.

Have you ever tried to work a deal with Jesus so that you would get from him more than you would ever consider giving to him?

There's this strange dynamic that occurs where human beings like me and you will try to cut a deal with Jesus.

We do some really strange and oftentimes very foolish things.

1. Jesus, if you just give me a sign, I'll stop _____ (whatever you know you shouldn't be doing).
2. I like Jesus to bless my life, save my soul, give me peace and joy; but there is no way I trust him enough to give anything of mine like time, money, energy, commitment.
3. Jesus, will you forgive me...again. The same old sin, the same old sinner...

In other words, **SLIDE: We like the idea of Jesus but not the way of Jesus. We try to avoid walking on the pathway of Jesus, but at the same time hope to end our journey with him - where he is.**

In this series, we are going to work through the biography on the life of Jesus by an apprentice of his named, Mark - or John Mark.

What we are going to emphasize throughout our time in this gospel are what we will call Fringe Benefits. Why "Fringe Benefits"?

Because there are benefits of following Jesus that we overlook or inadequately see the value of. Instead of "following" Jesus just to get to heaven and be blessed, there are reasons of great depth that we ought to consider.

So, let's not try to cut a deal with Jesus. Let's not try to barter with the man who gave us the perfect picture of our Father in Heaven, who gave up his life so that we might live, and who supernaturally and overwhelmingly rose from the dead on the 3rd day. Let's not ignore him or try to appease him.

Let's give him our attention and receive from him LIFE, HOPE, WHOLENESS, and FREEDOM that he promises to those who give themselves fully to him.

PRAYER

Mark 1

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, **2** as it is written in **Isaiah the prophet:**

"I will send my messenger ahead of you,

who will prepare your way"—

3 "a voice of one calling in the wilderness,

'Prepare the way for the Lord,

make straight paths for him."

4 And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of **repentance** for the forgiveness of sins. **5** The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. **Confessing** their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. **6** John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. **7** And this was his message: "After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. **8** I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit.**"

SLIDE: Benefits for the expectant - Hope Fulfilled.

Mark starts out his account of Jesus' life with a quote from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who while writing, was giving insight about a special announcer of good news who would increase the level of expectancy surrounding the Messiah's arrival.

The person Isaiah prophesied of, and the person Mark starts his gospel with is John the Baptist. John the baptizer eagerly awaited - he awaited expectantly for the arrival of Jesus.

Why? Because he knew the promises of God and he trusted that God would keep his promises. John was able to see himself within the story of God's plan and he was filled with an eager willingness to cooperate with God in that plan.

Here's what I want to help you see:

Layer 1: Our expectations determine our experiences.

Layer 2: Our informed expectations help us be prepared for the experiences.

Can you see the difference?

Just as an example -

If you show up to church on Sunday expecting to be unchanged or unmoved, oftentimes, that is exactly what happens. You leave and say, "I didn't really get anything out of that." But, If you show up to

church in person or online expecting to ENCOUNTER JESUS, oftentimes that is what you will experience. You leave and say, "I have been in the presence of Jesus and I am filled with joy, peace, newfound determination, courage, etc!"

Maybe it's not about showing up for church, it's about showing up for your daily quiet time with Jesus through reading the Scriptures and prayer and worship. If you just flip your Bible open and hope for the best - it's often a frustrating experience. But if you pray with expectation, asking the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and heart and mind to the Word of God - it often leads to a genuine experience or encounter with God.

But let's take it a step further.

When you base your expectations of God on the revelation of God through his word - your experience of God will be in alignment with what God has already revealed about himself.

- This is why when you observe or talk with mature Christians whose life has been shaped by the Scriptures, who have spent time in the presence of Christ, you'll notice the absence of many of the false teachings that have permeated many of our hearts. They have been rooted in the WORD of God and because of that they know what God has revealed to us about himself.
- The false promise of health, financial prosperity, ease of life...mature Christians know that to be a distortion of God's word, but also, they have discovered how unsatisfying those things ultimately are.

When you base your expectations of God on your own assumptions - with no basis in his revealed nature - your experience may leave you terribly wounded and upset; but this is not because God failed to meet his own standards, he just didn't meet your standards.

- This is a HUGE reason so many people have left churches and Christianity. Disappointment with God often stems from an expectation of God that is not clearly portrayed throughout the Scriptures. If the expectation is financial prosperity, the portrayal of God throughout the Scriptures, and specifically through Jesus, is not of financial prosperity but of dependency on God as provider and sustainer. If the expectation is convenient living, the portrayal is suffering in the midst of blessing and abundance.

And so, as John the baptizer begins to preach about the coming Messiah, and as he calls people to repentance he is doing exactly what Isaiah prophesied - he establishing an informed expectation of God for these people to be prepared to experience. In other words, this re-awakening of the message of the Messiah - Jesus - is going to become HOPE...FULFILLED.

SLIDE:

QUESTIONS:

What are your expectations of Jesus grounded in? Are they grounded in what God has already said you can expect through the Scriptures? Or, are they grounded in something that you or someone else has wanted to be true, but isn't grounded in the Scriptures?

I want to let you know - there are among us - among you right now - people who show up desperate for an Encounter with God each week...people longing to be changed and transformed. Their lives aren't perfect, and you might not be able to always identify them by some external evidence...

But do you know that each week we hear how people are encountering Jesus, being saved by him, being restored or encouraged by him?

Friends, it could be time for some of us to change our expectations based on what God has said through his word and what he is doing in our midst - and expect to experience his presence. You might find yourself undone, overwhelmed, or in awe; but that is the beauty of encountering God...he loves you so much that he welcomes you as you are and then transforms you from one degree to another.

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. **15** "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. **Repent and believe the good news!**"

16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. **17** "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." **18** At once they left their nets and followed him.

19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. **20** Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

SLIDE: Benefits for the apathetic - Hope Awoke

There are **some of you**, just like Simon and Andrew, James and John, who go about your life aware that God exists. Maybe you cry out to him in a crisis. Occasionally you'll use his name to add color to your vocabulary or to emphasize a point you're trying to make. But when it comes down to it - you hope God cares about you, but you certainly show no evidence of caring about him...loving him. You could say in a moment of honesty that you are spiritually apathetic...spiritually bored maybe.

The 1st century world that Jesus entered into was much the same. Spirituality may have been en vogue, but faithfulness and hope were far from the common experience of people.

Particularly the Jewish people who were severely oppressed by the Romans. Their lives were not easy and they lived in constant poverty and fear. Though many maintained their religious connection to God - there was a level despondency, that became common. God had been silent for generations. But then Jesus...

Say it with me...But Jesus

Jesus begins to preach and teach and as Mark provides a more brief summation of Jesus' teachings - he boils the first messages of Jesus down to something that is both comforting and alarming. Jesus says, "The kingdom of God has come near. **Repent and believe the good news!**"

We could spend a lot of time discussing the nature of the kingdom of God and the likely assumptions made by these fishermen based on their awareness of the OT Scriptures. The difference between what they had been taught and what they were hearing with their very own ears is this: what they were taught seemed like a hope based in wishful thinking - God had been silent for so long! **But these words of Jesus perked their ears - it was as if God himself were speaking right to them...and we know now that he was!**

They were alert.

All of their religious upbringing and the rules and manners and prophesies and Scriptures might have come to mind...and then Jesus said to them "*It's true - the Kingdom is here! Change direction. Turn around. What I have declared to be present among you is not wishful thinking but good news for you today!"*

Jesus' call to repent and believe is founded in the need for these apathetic Israelites to **wake up!** Turn around! **Stop aimlessly living and realize there is hope for this life because there is a King and a new Kingdom here to redeem and restore what has been taken, lost, or forgotten.**

This call to repent and believe the good news still stands today.

Hear this: There are some of us who need to be awoken to our need to change direction and believe the Good News of Jesus. Our spiritual apathy needs to be shaken, disturbed, turned upside down...not simply because I say so, but because the person of Jesus is so confrontational and so beautiful, that when you set your eyes upon him you can't help but to be moved by him.

I've talked about repentance quite a bit in recent months.

But I want to take a bit of a deeper dive into the idea of repentance the way Jesus calls to do it:

Please make just the headings (1, 2, 3) into slides. Thank you.

- 1. Repentance, first and foremost, is the acknowledgment of your own sinfulness and the guilt you carry as a result.**
 - a. This is the crisis point for many of us. (Romans 3:23, For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.)
 - b. Our rebuttal is that we just make mistakes. We are mistakers. We are just wanderers, not lost. But mistakers will even admit that if you make the same mistake twice it's no longer a mistake. Wanderers may not be lost, but they will also acknowledge a lack of direction, purpose, or even meaning. Jesus levels up and says to humanity - the word you are looking for is not mistaker or wanderer, but sinner.

- c. In an anything goes world where what is right and what is wrong is not slightly agreed upon, the concept of sin is highly disturbing. It requires personal recognition of living in the wrong direction.
- d. I can't tell you every possible way that you might need to change, I don't even know all the ways I myself need to change...but here's what I will tell you: look to Jesus. Jesus is the standard...the balance...the blueprint...and wherever you don't align with or measure up to him - that's your sign.
- e. Once we get to the place of agreeing with Jesus about our common problem, we can begin to move toward the next step.

2. Repentance, secondly, leads us to godly grief.

- a. Godly grief is not self punishment, self hatred, God's rejection of you, or anything else that might involve you feeling like you need to pay for your sin or that you'll never been good enough. Jesus did that already. Jesus has covered the price of your sin with his own lifeblood. This has nothing to do with your goodness and everything to do with his goodness.
- b. Grieving your sin is a demonstration of your acknowledgment of the severity of your sin. It's not being sorry for getting caught. It's grieving the pain you have inflicted upon the name of Jesus or upon other people.
- c. Godly grief over your sin, or even over the sins of your family, church, community, and nation is the kind of grief where it turns your heart toward the heart of Jesus and weeps over the gap between you and the righteousness of Christ that was exposed by your sin.

3. Repentance, lastly, results in a change of purpose.

- a. Literally, if you change the direction of your life, your purpose is changing by the nature of the direction you're moving in.
- b. Your purpose no longer revolves around your personal achievements, possessions, earnings, followers, subscribers, looks and appearances, or anything else that will one day fade away; your purpose is now narrowed drastically...**your purpose is to know, worship and be in the presence of Jesus. Love him. Devote yourself to him.**
- c. What he does with you as a result of that is between you and him. **But your purpose now has a lot less background noise and a lot more power.**

Notice the response of Simon and Andrew, James and John.

The high calling of Christ on their lives was so captivating, so irresistible...any apathy that they were living in was disrupted and replaced with total devotion.

It wasn't a decision that they needed to labor over because it was a decision that was almost compulsive - they were compelled by the invitation to follow Jesus.

There are some of you hearing this today - you need to hear the heart of God through Jesus Christ for you in this moment...

Some of us have lived within the Christian subculture for so long that we don't recognize the level of need we have to be jolted from our spiritual slumber. You've blended in for so long, you've lost any desire to put forth effort...or you've been living a twisted version of Christianity that looks more like you than Jesus...and in either case we've got to be provoked to life!

I believe that for some, Jesus is calling to you today... The Kingdom of heaven is near, repent and believe the Good News! It's time to change the direction of your life. It's time to recover the purpose you might have lost. It's time to agree with Jesus that you, in fact, are a sinner who is deeply and powerfully loved by Jesus.

Whether you are eagerly awaiting the presence and flow of Jesus in your life or you have been caught up in mindless, faithless cultural Christianity - today, for each of us, is an invitation to step forward in faith...

Step into new life in Jesus...

His invitation to you is not to first get your life together, it's to come to him and watch him put your life together as you follow him.

His invitation to you is to acknowledge the ways that your life is not in alignment with his - this is called sin - and to REPENT and BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS.

PRAYER....

For the expectant...

For the repentant...

For the apathetic...

COMMUNION....

Instructions...

1 Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. **28** Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. **29** For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

