

Fringe Benefits_Wk2_New Direction

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Scripture: Mark 2:17-27; 4:1-20

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Have you ever had the experience while driving with the use of a GPS where you hear the dreaded voice announce "ReCalculating"?

When you hear that you automatically have this sense of confusion.

There's the initial reaction where you sort of panic because - especially if you're in an unfamiliar place with lots of fast moving traffic - you feel like you need to make a quick decision and pull over, change lanes, take the next exit...whatever.

But then, if the GPS begins to twitch, you also begin to twitch.

****One time recently the Google Map that I poowas using - which was very reliable up to this point - just all of the sudden changed my destination and what was supposed to be a 3 minute drive was now being displayed as an hour and twenty minute drive!**

I started to twitch.

To make it more fun, sometimes the GPS not cooperating can lead to the need for marriage counseling after your trip is done.

So after the GPS has recalculated, you're now dealing with the fact that you've lost time on the trip, you're late for the dinner or the start of the event...and you're both rushed and a little wound up with irritation. So you speed to get where you're going really fast in an effort to compensate for lost time.

There's a sense in which what I just described - that almost all of us have experienced in one way or another - also describes life after choosing to follow Jesus.

Last week we began this series called Fringe Benefits and it's a series through the Gospel of Mark where we read an account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus begins his ministry with a strong message - REPENT and BELIEVE the GOOD NEWS.

If repentance is all about a change of direction...from a life lived moving away from Jesus, to a life lived in the direction of Jesus, it's almost as if there was this digitally recorded voice playing in your mind...

Recalculating...

And for some of us, the question that we ask after we choose to repent and change direction with our life...moving in the direction of Jesus...is:

What way is the direction of Jesus? Or, in other words, what does following Jesus actually look like for me? What does living for and within this new kingdom that Jesus announced even mean?

The way of Jesus or, the direction of Jesus, can be summed up in one word: Follow.

But this word, follow, carries with it a vast and rich experience of spending time with and then adopting the practices of who it is you follow.

Hear this: Jesus' invitation to you to repent and believe the Good News is an invitation to change direction by living within the realities and adopting the values of Jesus.

What happens when you choose to do this is a collision between two forces. The force and habits of the pre-Jesus life you were living and the force and desire of the life you have been invited to.

Allow me to add an additional element that must be addressed:

Just as there is a collision of two forces for someone who is a new believer, there is a regular collision of forces for those among us who have been religious, grew up in church, and are following Jesus.

What I mean by this is that as you grow in Christ-like maturity, or as you are equipped to grow towards greater expressions of Christ-likeness, there is a collision between who you are being called to become and who you currently are

There is always a temptation toward ease and comfort and convenience. Good enough.

Whether you are a new follower of Jesus or a seasoned follower of Jesus, this collision is an on-going dynamic.

Here is how Jesus describes it:

Mark 2:18 Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, "How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but yours are not?"

This is the collision point between two Kingdoms.

The religious spirit dwells in a kingdom outside the kingdom of Jesus. Jesus kingdom is repulsive to the religious spirit.

The reason for these questions stems from the Old Covenant mentality. This is the pre-Jesus mentality.

Do you know that this sort of thing still happens today? There are times that even Christians - those who live in this new Kingdom that Jesus established - have a mentality that has no place in Jesus Kingdom.

The most common example is when people compare what happens now with what happened when they were growing up. And there are legitimate reasons for this, but oftentimes what happens is that

we assume what we experienced growing up was the only right way to 'do church' or to 'follow Jesus'; when in reality those expressions were based far more on a preference than on anything else. It didn't make them necessarily wrong, but it also didn't make them the only right way either.

The issue of contention is fasting.

Why do we follow the rules of Old Covenant, but you and your disciples do not?

The religious leaders often fasted twice a week. For them this was right. And it is still something that we do today.

What was the reason that Jesus didn't make his disciples fast?

19 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? They cannot, so long as they have him with them. **20** But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and on that day they will fast.

What a cryptic response!

What Jesus is saying is that while he is present with his followers, they have no need to fast. Fasting is abstaining from - usually food - to heighten our ability to be alert, to listen with greater desire, to seek God with greater intensity, and to remind us to pursue him when we experience the physical sense of hunger.

Because Jesus was so close, literally touchable, they had no need to fast because the One whom they would be fasting to get closer to was with them.

Jesus did say however, that there will come a day when fasting will once again become an appropriate and viable pathway toward intimacy and closeness with him.

But for Jesus, as Jesus always does, he takes the issue at hand and turns it into a teachable moment to help explain the realities of this new kingdom he is establishing.

21 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. **22** And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

Do you see the connection between the collision of two kingdoms through what Jesus just described?

SLIDE: There is an incompatibility between life before Jesus and life after Jesus.

The idea is simple: The way of Jesus is disruptive to your life. The way of Jesus isn't something you get to sprinkle on your life like a pinch of pepper to add a little religious value to your life. You don't add Jesus to your life like an odor eliminator - not really addressing the problem, just covering it up. Jesus is either everything or nothing.

SLIDE: There is an incompatibility between rigorous adherence to the law (before Jesus), and embracing the grace-filled purposes of the new kingdom of Christ.

SLIDE: When you try to mix and match the old with the new, you get confused.

SLIDE: When you completely ignore the old to focus on the new, you miss the big picture.

SLIDE: When you reject the new and remain stuck in the old, you miss Jesus.

SLIDE: But what happens when you allow the Jesus-life to fully take root in your life?

A little bit later on in his biography Mark records one of the first teachings of Jesus about the nature of those who hear about this new kingdom.

Listen to what he says...

Mark 4: Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. **2** He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: **3** "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.

4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. **6** But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.

8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

As you begin to change direction with your life, whether as a new believer or as someone who is eagerly seeking the deeper things of Christ as a long-time follower; this illustration - this story intended to communicate a very specific teaching about the kingdom of God - is so relevant!

How many times have you heard a great sermon online, via a podcast, on the radio, or maybe here at Encounter and thought to yourself - this is going to be so useful! But within hours, you can't recall much of what you heard and you've maybe even lost interest in whatever it was that seemed so impactful at the time.

Jesus is describing a similar experience as the message and teachings of the Kingdom of God are scattered among people - there are times that the seed lands among a vulnerable or oppressed segment of the population and before the seed really has any hope of doing seed-like things, it is quickly snuffed out, snatched away, and removed.

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There is another group of people that Jesus describes as being like shallow rocky soil. It's not that there is no capacity for the kingdom of God within their lives, but neither is there an ability to receive the message of the kingdom deep into their lives either.

It's as if they are like that old garment or old wineskin Jesus referred to earlier. There's still a small capacity to function - accepting the patchwork without pulling away and fraying life even further, or containing new wine for a short time before it bursts...The capacity for the Jesus life is limited by the reluctance to let it into your life deeper than just the surface.

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A third type of person that Jesus describes is the person who actually has all of the potential necessary to receive and expand the kingdom of God in and through their lives. Conditions are perfect.

Except for one thing: There is no exclusivity. In other words, along with the Jesus life; within your heart there is also a love of money, a love of power, a love of sex and sexuality, a love of people's approval...and what ends up happening is that even though Jesus is powerful and capable of conquering sin and the desire for sin - he can't do that when you won't cooperate. Those thorns grow as you feed them, and as you feed them - because they are incompatible with the Kingdom of God, they choke out the life of Jesus in you.

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The fourth and last kind of person that Jesus describes is the one who humbly receives and cultivates within their life the words, teachings, and values of the Kingdom of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Jesus says that this person has a capacity not just to receive the seed of the Kingdom, but to produce a harvest so astounding that it created the ability for even more seed to be scattered and for the cycle to continue.

It's important to acknowledge something:

The quality of the seed being scattered is not changed based on the conditions of the soil.

In other words, the Kingdom of God, the message of Jesus, does not change because the people hearing it are vulnerable, preoccupied, disinterested, or uncooperative. This sounds or feels unloving. Why wouldn't Jesus adjust things for us? Why wouldn't he accommodate us more?

But it's actually incredibly significant that we understand this: **SLIDE: The message of Jesus is Good News to every person in every condition in every location, in every time in history and in every**

cultural challenge. The Good News that Jesus came to distribute is Good News for all people at all times.

And so if that can be accepted as true, the variable in this equation is you. It's me.

The condition of the soil - the condition of your heart, mind, and soul - despite how it may feel like you have no control over it, is something you actually have control over.

The way Jesus communicated it, in Mark 4: **20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown."**

The idea is that to accept the teachings of Jesus isn't just to like them, to think on them, to discuss them, but it's to receive them or to absorb them. There is a responsibility that you and I have for the condition of our heart in receiving the words of Jesus - the values and ideals of this new Kingdom.

We live in a time when people talk like experts, live like victims, and embrace perspectives and values that ultimately reveal how we see ourselves as gods to be worshiped as deities of our own finite kingdoms.

We live in a time when the seed of the Kingdom has been contaminated by controversy, corruption, and power.

The pathway out of this is not to bow-up with defensiveness.

The pathway is out is the one where we bow low in acceptance of Jesus and his complete message.

For the remaining few minutes I want to share with you some ways this can be done.

Again, if you have a role to play in becoming the kind of soil where the words of Jesus come to life - where the Good News of Jesus becomes this life-altering, perspective changing, completely transformational reality for you; what do you need to do?

1. Ask

- a. Literally, ask the Holy Spirit to cultivate within you a receptivity to the Word of God and to the life of Jesus.
- b. **John 14:14 says, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."**
- c. Jesus makes it clear that when we ask him to act in our lives according to what we already know of his nature, character, and goodness; the answer is a resounding yes!
- d. When you talk to Jesus and maybe it's a cry of despair, a sigh of exhaustion, or a should of gladness - when you cry out to him and ask him to act in ways that he already said he would, he will!
- e. Maybe you know that your heart is resistant and shut-off from anything to do with Jesus, but you cry out to him, "Jesus, please soften my heart! Help to receive you. Help me to hear you. Create within me a new heart O God!"

- f. What do you think he's going to do? Tell you, sorry, maybe next time? No! He's going to move. He's going to draw close to you as you draw close to him! That's a PROMISE!
- g. The things we all need to ask God to do on our behalf are less about the physical things like provision and protection. It's not wrong to ask for those things and the Scriptures instruct us that it is appropriate.
- h. The greater need that you have, the greater condition that you are currently living in, it's got nothing to do with the price of gas or the cost of food - although those are real and if you have a serious need, please let the church know so that we can try to help you - it's got a lot to do with our ability to take God at his word.

i. **ILLUSTRATION:**

- i. **Prayer for a changed heart...effort...led to results.**
- ii. **Prayer for restored relationships...surrender...at least led to reconciliation and often to restoration.**

2. Adjust

- a. Once God gives us his word, we then need to adjust. This is very simple. But for even the most mature among us, sometimes it's easy to ask God for help and then to sit back and wait.
- b. Most of the time we have something to do while we wait.
- c. When God speaks or responds to your request that aligns with him - often the hardest part of this interaction is to submit to the answer.
- d. Here's what happens:
 - i. You want to know God and the power of the Holy Spirit. You want to live the Jesus life.
 - ii. You pray a sincere prayer that aligns with God's revealed will.
 - iii. A collision between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the spirit ensues.
 - iv. You all of the sudden get wrapped up in this inner conflict that makes you doubt whether you really want what Jesus wants, or that you really even want to know him at all.
- e. **James, the brother of Jesus, writes, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded" (James 4:7-8).**
- f. The space between the request and the ability to act on the request is this period of adjustment...where you adjust your will to God's. Where your motives are exposed, but also, if you will persist, where your heart is purified.
- g. ILLUSTRATION: In my experience, often where this adjustment period accomplishes the greatest work, is in praise and worship. As I lift my voice - audibly - in song and in surrender...the Spirit of God does this supernatural work that I can't fully explain other than the hellish thoughts and motives that might be working against me lose their authority and power.

3. Act

- a. **James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But whoever looks intently**

into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

- b. This is the Good News of Jesus becoming the advancement of the Kingdom of God...
- c. This is the New Wine being poured into New Wineskins
- d. As you ACT in RESPONSE to the Presence of God in your life...as you ACT in RESPONSE to the Holy Spirit's leading...
- e. As you put into practice the things that God has taught you...
- f. The life of Jesus overtakes your life and you begin to think and live as Jesus did...this is the Kingdom of God coming on earth as it is in heaven.

It starts with a combination of individual surrender and corporate unified direction.

But listen...

The work Jesus set out to establish, the message Jesus came to teach, the arrival of this new kingdom...

We - those who follow Jesus - need to go first.

We can't just preach Good News - we need to be transformed by it so that our message is more than what the religious leaders of Jesus' day expressed...but instead that our message is one of power, authority, and evident transformation!