

The Gospel of the Kingdom Pt 7

I remember the first time that I preached that wasn't to our youth group during Youth Week. My father was helping a church in Deltona and he asked me to preach. I was visiting my parents from Bible college, and I guess he wanted to show off his son. I must have worked on the sermon for weeks and I was so nervous preaching to a bunch of people I had never met before. Nevertheless, I soldiered on. I think I read the whole thing. The whole thing was a blur. Everyone was very encouraging and told me that I did great, even when I knew that it wasn't. They were used to hearing my father who was a great preacher.

Was it a great sermon? No. But it was a beginning and I had to be completely dependent on God, because I knew that I could never measure up to my father.

Regardless, God used it and I think my father was proud. Afterward, he gave me a few pointers, which was his way of saying, "I'm proud of you and you have to start sometime." I have preached hundreds of times since then and I am still dependent on God because without Him I have nothing to offer.

As we read last week, now that Jesus had been affirmed by the Father, empowered by the Spirit and tested by the devil, it was time for Him to begin His ministry in earnest.

Today as we begin the Advent season, we will look the actions that Jesus took and the message that He would preach.

1. Jesus Starts His Ministry -Matthew 4:12-17

Matt 4:12

Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16 the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned."

Jesus was deeply impacted by the arrest of John, his cousin and forerunner. It was a cautionary tale that He needed to start slow and not make too many waves in the beginning so that what was ordained to happen would not happen prematurely.

His family had moved to Nazareth to get away from the religious center of Israel. This way they could raise him in reasonable anonymity.

However, Nazareth was home to a Roman garrison and now could travel quickly through Roman couriers if anything out of the ordinary happened there.

So Jesus decides to move to Capernaum which is a fishing village northeast of Nazareth by the Sea of Galilee. This way north of Bethlehem and Jerusalem and far from the religious centers of Israel.

But He also chose it because He was being obedient to the Father who had chosen it hundreds of year before through the words of the prophet Isaiah. Again, Matthew is deliberate in letting us know that everything in Jesus' life happened as a fulfillment of prophecy.

17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Now obviously, Jesus said more than this, but this was the gist of His preaching.

First of all, this is the exact same message that John the Baptist was preaching. He built on John's message which had started to resonate with the people.

Second of all, in time, Jesus will give more detail as to what this means and His role in it.

The first part of His message is to repent. He is calling us to examine ourselves. As AA says in their 12 steps. *"We are to make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."*

We first have to acknowledge where we fall short. But then, we have to repent, or turn away from. In addition, repentance adds asking God to forgive us.

It's not enough to say "my bad", we have to actively seek His forgiveness and then we have to strive to not repeat those behaviors.

In Jesus and His life, we see the beginning of the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, later on He will teach His disciples to pray:

Matt 6:10

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

In His ministry we see the beginning of the "here and not yet" of the kingdom of God.

For hundreds of years the Day of the Lord, the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven, was way in the future. But John the Baptist and now Jesus is telling them that it's right around the corner. In fact, they are seeing the beginning of it right before their eyes.

2. Jesus Calls the First Disciples Matthew 4:18-22

One of the things that we have to be aware of is that when we read the Bible things happen right after the other, that this is a condensed version of events and that time lapses in between verses and chapters. Jesus had been living in Capernaum for some time before He calls his first disciples. As a matter of fact, if you watched The Chosen, while a lot of that is extrabiblical, it is likely that they had heard of Him and overserved Him and that this wasn't the isolated event that these verses seem to indicate. There was probably some kind of exposure or relationship present before they were called.

18 While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. 19 And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father,

mending their nets, and he called them. 22 Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Think about this. This is their livelihood; this is all they have done all their lives. This is all they know. This is a multigenerational enterprise.

You just don't pick up and walk away from something like that. You just don't walk away from your father and leave him to fend for himself.

There had to have been something that made them abandon their livelihood, their family and all that they were, to follow Jesus.

It reminds me of Wimber's conversion. He was a successful music producer in Las Vegas and a group about to hit the big time in the Righteous Brothers. And yet, he gave it all up, to follow Jesus and to make disciples.

What would you be willing to give up to follow Him?

What have you given up to follow Him?

3. Jesus Ministers to Great Crowds Matthew 4:23-25

- His message was resonating with a people who were looking forward to something better.
- It resonated with a people who needed hope.
- It resonated with a people who grew up with the prophecies of the coming Kingdom, yet it seemed further away than ever.
- It resonated with them because He spoke with authority of the Father, and not like the Rabbi's, whose authority came from quoting famous Rabbis before them.
- It resonated with them because it wasn't just empty words, it was accompanied by the demonstration of God's power through miracles.

23 And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. 24 So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. 25 And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

If His goal was to remain anonymous, He certainly didn't achieve that. In an era before the internet, before twitter, Instagram, Tick-Tok, YouTube, Facebook and instant messenger, His fame grew incredibly fast.

Conclusion

Back in the 90's there was an ABC News Special about three movements that were growing in Christianity. Peter Jennings, the host, looked into the seeker sensitive movement with their videos, plays and an introductory presentation of the Gospel. They also looked into the Holy laughter movement that was going on in Lakeland. Finally, he looked at the Vineyard movement which had grown out of the Jesus People movement of the 70's. When he interviewed Wimber he quoted John as saying that the Vineyard needs the manna of signs and wonders to survive. He asked John if that was true.

Wimber's response was *"I believe that the Church of Jesus Christ needs that today in order to survive... we can't spend the money on theater that the theater can, we can't entertain better than television can, we're not better spokesmen, not better philosophers, we can't counsel better than the counselors do; what do we have going?"*

So, my question today is this?

What would you be willing to do to see a powerful move of the Spirit that is accompanied by signs and wonders?

What would you be willing to give up and walk away from to be radically transformed and see the Spirit act in power?

- The disciples were comfortable in their trades.
- They were comfortable in their multigenerational heritage.
- They were comfortable being invisible and just living life.

In an instant they gave it all away to follow Jesus.