

Kingdom Priorities

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[0 : 00] How do I pray? Our Father, we thank you for church tonight. Thank you that we can gather together and sit under your word. Father, would you open our hearts and minds with your spirit so that we might understand the truth and know how to respond and give us the courage to do it.

Amen. I like looking back at advertisements from the past that got their products and the supposed benefits so wrong.

Listen to this claim from 1942. The ad claimed, new way to get more good from vitamins. I wonder if you can guess what the product is.

That's right, vitamin doughnuts. Each fortified with a minimum of 25 units of vitamin B.

How much is a unit? Who knows? What about this next one? Do you want to glow with health?

[1 : 15] Then build your personality, magnetism and vitality with Virex, violet rays. In 1922, violet rays were said to cure pretty much anything that ailed you.

Virex, a device plugged into light sockets so users could give them home shock treatments. And they supposedly made you more vital, compelling and magnetic.

Do you remember Eric? I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself. The lawsuits... The lawsuits...

They were taken off the market when the lawsuits followed. And finally, I couldn't miss this, of course. Dieting, try sugar.

Sugar might just be the willpower you need to curb your appetite. Sugar's quick energy could be the willpower you need to eat less. Have a soft drink before your main meal, it says.

[2 : 24] Or some candy an hour before lunch. This is just what I've been missing. Isn't it great that we never do this anymore? In some cases, these advertisers are oblivious.

And in other cases, they're confidently wrong. And that does happen today, doesn't it? If we can trick them, we will. Today, as we reflect on the passage that Josh read, we're going to think about when we are like these advertisers, either oblivious or knowing that we're wrong and either unwilling or unable to change.

Last week, we saw Jesus fulfil all righteousness in his baptism and resist temptation by Satan, simply holding on to God's word.

It was a remarkable declaration and proclamation of God's son and king. Today, we're going to see this proclamation continue, but differently.

Jesus begins his ministry and the ministry that will eventually take him to the cross. The kingdom of heaven is drawn near and now at the dawn of his ministry, Jesus reveals his priority for the kingdom.

[3 : 53] And I wonder what you think those priorities would be. Well, unsurprisingly, they are about bringing change.

Take a look in your Bibles from verse 12. When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee.

Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah.

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. Jesus understood the role of John the Baptist, that it was to prepare his way and now his job was done, John's job, he knew it was his time.

[4 : 59] He left where he grew up in Nazareth and moved to Capernaum. And it wasn't a random decision. Like everything Jesus did, including the cross, it was deliberate.

And like the cross, even this move was prophesied. Isaiah had spoken about the people living in the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, living in great darkness, in the land of the shadow of death, and Jesus coming is like a great light dawning.

I wonder what comes to mind for you when you hear people living in great darkness, land of the shadow of death.

I tend to think of a country without sun, something like this, maybe an evil overlord ruling the land, something maybe from *Stranger Things*, where it's gloomy and sad all the time, like in the *Upside Down*.

Are you familiar with this picture? Then there's the opposing image, isn't there? They've seen a great light. A light has dawned.

[6 : 20] It kind of makes me think of the light coming in the window and the alarm waking you up in midwinter in Melbourne when the sun rises at midday. It's interesting to think about this imagery, isn't it?

Because in reality, the people in Galilee, well, they're very likely just carrying on with their lives, aren't they? Like you and me. If we were there, we wouldn't notice anything in particular. Living in darkness, a great light. And so it makes us ask, in what sense are they in darkness? What is this light?

Well, verse 17 is the answer. Have a look. From that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

The very first word of Jesus' ministry is so telling. It shows us exactly what is on Jesus' heart as he begins his work.

[7 : 31] But more than that, it helps us understand that the darkness the people of Galilee were in, it helps us understand that darkness. How? Because of what repent means and what repent expects.

Telling people to repent means they need to change their ways and it expects them to live differently. If Jesus' message of repentance is a light to people living in darkness, then he is telling them to change what they are doing and to come out of it by living differently.

Because if they continue living the way they are, not only will they remain in darkness, but they will end up dead. The dawn of Jesus' ministry is repent.

Change your mind. Change your ways. Change your life. Because those who need to hear are in danger, great danger, danger of death.

So I guess what's important to ask is do we need to hear it? Do you need to hear it? You've likely heard Jesus' message of repent before, but the challenge with repentance is that it encourages ongoing change.

[9 : 04] If I can borrow Isaiah's image, the light of Jesus' message tends to expose that which we need to change, but we often like to keep that thing hidden, don't we?

During this week and for a while previously, Jesus has been bellowing, repent, into a particularly dark area of my life.

An area which he knows all about and which I know about all too well. It's an issue that I want to change. I regularly pray about it with the theme of repentance on my lips.

This is why I'm defining repentance as change of mind, change of life. We often think about repentance as turning around, but repentance is deeper than that.

If you're living in darkness and you don't realise it, if you're confidently wrong or simply oblivious, even if you are aware of a need to change and you're struggling to make it, repentance is about making that change, about thinking and acting differently and continuing to do so.

[10 : 27] I'm not telling you that I'm not sorry for the sins that I'm struggling with. I'm telling you my goal.

My goal with God's help is to leave that darkness behind. What's your goal? What darkness are you trying to leave behind?

Jesus' priority of repentance continues in the rest of the passage, although the language changes. In the next two sections, Jesus moves on to two distinct yet similar groups of people. Distinct because he knows, sorry, because of what he says to and does for them, but similar because of how they respond.

And what we continue to see here at the dawn of his ministry is what the king prioritises for his kingdom. And firstly, it's training.

[11 : 40] Look at verse 18. As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew.

And they were casting a net into the lake for they were fishermen. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will send you out to fish for people. At once they left their nets and followed him. For many of us, this is a familiar story, isn't it?

Jesus calls his first disciples Simon, Peter, and his brother Andrew, James, his brother John. Jesus says, follow me, and they do it.

And it's not like these guys are just kicking around town, looking for something to do. They're at work. They're in their day job, making a living, some with family, some for family.

And they just bailed their income, their livelihood. Imagine if you just walked out on that decree that your parents are paying for.

[13 : 06] sorry. It's crazy to behold, isn't it?

But as I said, this is familiar, isn't it? It's a familiar. We've talked about it. What if we think about this in view of the king's priorities? At this stage of his ministry, isn't it fascinating?

When we think about Jesus' ministry, what comes to mind? Culture shaping teaching, authority and power? Yet here, the second thing on Jesus' agenda is a stroll along the beach looking for inexperienced blokes to train.

Now, while I don't think this is challenging me or anyone to lower our standards of who should be trained for ministry, it is raising an interesting point about the king's priorities in the kingdom.

And that his Christ model of proclaiming repentance in the kingdom begins and won't happen without training. What do I mean?

[14 : 20] In the very next scene, Jesus begins teaching to the masses, doesn't he? And they flocked to him, didn't they? And the disciples, well, they were right there front and oh, hold on, were the disciples even mentioned?

Jesus was teaching, Jesus was proclaiming, Jesus was healing. what did he even need them for? I wonder if you've ever felt something like this, either as a trainer or maybe just watching on.

Do we really have to put up with this? Can't we just let the experts handle it? But then imagine what the first disciples were like, untrained, untested fishermen compared to the Son of God.

Do you think he needed them? Yet he prioritised recruiting them before heading out to the masses to train them to continue his work of catching people.

The King, the Son of God, he doesn't need anyone's help, not my help, not your help. In fact, he's the only one who has the power to unlock the shadow of death over the land and the people.

[16 : 06] He's the only one who can die for our sins and did it. But his priority of training demonstrates to us the importance he places on bringing others to partner with him in the work.

And the rest of the New Testament clearly picks up this model. And now in the last part of the passage, Jesus gets to the teaching, the preaching and the healing.

The thing which is easy to think is at the core of Jesus' ministry comes third. Yes, he started with repent, but rather than having a session with a crowd about repentance, I think Matthew is helping us understand the tone of all of Jesus' ministry, particularly seen in the rest of the passage, specifically teaching and proclaiming, but repentance is the goal.

People change and follow. Even his invitation to the first disciples was a call to repent of sorts, to change their minds and their life.

And not only did they completely turn away from what they were doing, they didn't look back. And so here Jesus teaches and heals, doesn't he?

[17 : 31] News spreads, fame grows, people from all over are brought to him, the sick and suffering, the demon possessed, those with seizures and the paralyzed, great crowds from everywhere followed him.

Jesus was a people magnet. But it's important to notice that Jesus wasn't just healing people, he was teaching the good news of the kingdom.

Yes, he had something coming from him that was supernatural and incredible to behold and yes, his disciples, the fishermen trainees he just met, they also had amazing power in their day of ministry.

But people flocking to Jesus because of his good news, the news of salvation which brings life to those living in death, that didn't stop when the signs and wonders did.

Here's the similarity and distinction I was talking about earlier. Jesus challenges change among both the disciples and the people among the regions and both end up following him.

[18 : 47] But while he teaches the masses the good news in the hope that they will change mind and life and come out of darkness and follow, he specifically invites the disciples to join him in making followers and catching people.

people. It might sound a bit like I'm saying the same thing, one group to follow, another group which follows. But like I mentioned before, this model of training on the one hand and discipling on the other is picked up by the apostles in the rest of the New Testament.

Not everyone is qualified to teach, to use Paul's language in 2 Timothy. But those who are compelled by the Lord himself having been trained to proclaim the good news of the kingdom to make disciples of all nations.

So what is the right way to respond to this? What is Jesus inviting me to do? Well I think the place to start for thinking about a response for application is to ask what is the wrong response for me, for you, especially as a believer, if that's you.

And I think the wrong response is nothing. It's saying nothing to me because I'm already a follower. that's wrong because of Isaiah's prophecy.

[20 : 28] That's wrong because of the rebellion of those living in utter darkness. That's wrong because they and we cannot help ourselves.

Jesus' ministry of repentance is a great light shining on those in darkness. And while we are not Galilee, without him we are living in the shadow of death because of our sin.

Jesus' message of repentance is the light that leads out of death, it's eternal life. It leads out of death and enables us to continue walking after him.

So whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever you're doing, Jesus is telling you change your mind and keep changing your mind. Change your ways and keep changing your ways.

Change your life and keep changing your life and follow him. Jesus wants everyone to repent.

[21 : 29] It's the message of life to the masses, the good news of the gospel, healing not from various diseases but from death.

Something we all need regardless of our present health or happiness. repentance. So let me ask you, have you repented?

And are you repenting? But I wonder if Jesus could be saying more to you today.

Could Jesus be asking of you another kind of repentance? repentance. How? Follow me and I will teach you to catch people.

Now, you might be thinking that I spent so much time talking about the difference between those followers who follow and those followers who catch how you're supposed to know.

[22 : 39] I wonder if this is a good way to think about it. Instead of asking, is Jesus challenging me to catch people? You could ask, could I leave my nets?

Or in other words, could I leave my job, my livelihood, my loves?

Or another way to think about it, why would I not? I have a family. I have a stable job.

I'm about to have a stable job. I need to get settled. I need to get a mortgage. I just got a mortgage.

I like my job. I need more experience. I don't think I'll be any good. I don't think do it. Don't get me wrong, there are good reasons to not leave your job to catch people.

[23 : 45] One in particular, no one who's doing it has suggested that you should do it. do it. But if they have, could Jesus be using them to challenge you with a different kind of change of mind and change of life?

If it's any consolation, Jesus' disciples got lots of things wrong, but we know the gospel today because they left their nets. the people living in the land of the shadow of death whom Jesus is calling are either confidently wrong or oblivious, and he is their light and life.

Perhaps you have responded, repented of sin, following Jesus. That's fantastic. Is there any chance you're still calling?

Confidently wrong, oblivious, refusing the call, unwilling to change? How about I pray for us?

Our Father, we thank you for our Saviour Jesus who proclaimed repentance at the dawn of his ministry. ministry. We ask that you would cause us to be continually changing our minds and lives and walking after Jesus.

[25 : 22] Thank you for showing us Jesus' ministry priorities. Would you help us to consider what Jesus is asking of us today and ask for his strength to respond?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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