

RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP DEMANDS REPENTANCE

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Mark 1:1-8

Radical: that which is marked by a considerable departure from that which is usual.

Discipleship: the act of being a disciple. Disciple, from the Greek word Mathetes, which means learner. One who accepts and assists in the spreading of the teaching of another (Webster). If you are a member of the Ray of Hope and a disciple of Christ, the question is: in your relationship with God in 2007 will it be more of the same?

To be a disciple of Christ is to believe His teaching, to rest on His sacrifice, to take in His Spirit, to imitate His example— (Eastman's Bible Dictionary)

God is calling us to a new level of discipleship. He wants something radically different.

The Gospel of Mark starts rather abruptly. It is the shortest Gospel. Early tradition tells us that the author is John Mark. Mark is the young man who was a companion of Peter and accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Mark writes as a journalist. His opening sentence has only twelve words that answer the questions who, what, why, and when. He saves the answer to the question where for a later time.

The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, v1. There is an air of excitement in every word that Mark writes. It is Good News. The name Jesus is the Greek form of the name Joshua-The Lord is Salvation. The Good News has been provided that salvation will be given to every man, woman, boy and girl who gives their life to Christ. The Good News is that God is here and God is on our side. The Good News is that God is reaching out and meeting the needs of his people. The people to whom Mark was writing needed Good News. They were going through a persecution. Mark wants them to know that suffering and death, rejection, and scorn are the norm for those who are disciples of Jesus.

For those who were literally losing their lives for the sake of the Gospel this was Good News. It is Good News to know that whatever you are going through you have not a high priest who is not able to sympathize with you in your weakness. The Good News is this: we have victory in Jesus Christ.

Too many Christians today want to know, "what's in it for me?" Just as in the world so it is in the kingdom: no pain, no gain. Most of us want the prosperity without the cross. Jesus shows us how to live life to the fullest, but that doesn't mean we won't have trials sometimes. Jesus teaches us that the like of radical discipleship means following him no matter the cost. Jesus was about giving to, living for, and serving others. No one wants to talk about servanthood. No one wants to talk about living in such a way that everyone around you is blessed simply because of your presence. What about washing someone's back without expecting him or her to wash yours in return? We live in a world where no one wants to give anything. Radical discipleship is about giving.

Mark is a fast moving Gospel. Mark accentuates with the use of the word "immediately." Jesus is constantly moving. When you read the lessons of Mark you will see that Jesus was in the temple on the Sabbath day and the rest of the time he was out meeting the needs of the people. That's what he expects of us. Jesus was busy.

To be a disciple of Christ we have to constantly be on the move making a difference in the world. It's radical to think he would use common everyday people like you and I who don't have a clue about what it means to be self - denying. Yet, he calls us.

Jesus is the Son of God sent into the world by God. The prophets told us in Mal 3.1 and in Isa 40.3-5. The first prophecy is about judgment. The second is about salvation and deliverance. If Jesus were to come back in the next few moments, would you be ready? Is your house in order? The song says, Joy to the world the Lord has come, let earth receive her king. In order for him to be king, he has to rule and have authority in your life.

Mal 3.2 says, who can endure the day of his coming? Jesus is coming again and he is coming to purify. He will separate the wheat from the chaff. The best is coming, but you cannot have it unless you are ready to receive Him. We have to get prepared.

John came preaching repentance. In ancient times, anytime a king was coming, a messenger was sent to prepare the way. The crooked places had to be made straight. The Holy Spirit has to prepare the way. The first way to be prepared is to confess (to agree with God). If God says you are guilty, you are guilty. Nevertheless, you are expecting great things from God in 2007 but the passage to your heart is blocked. You have to confess your sins.

It is not enough to acknowledge our sins; we have to repent which is a deliberate turning. Radical discipleship is making a thorough change. Repentance is not saying you are sorry and going back to the same behavior. True repentance requires change in your life. It's a turning from self and turning to God.

God has plans to prosper you and not harm you but you are blocking your own blessing. True repentance is the hardest thing you can do. You have to walk away, cut off communication, let old habits die and burn the bridge. We don't like to burn bridges because we want to leave the opportunity to be able to go back. When you repent you burn the bridge. It starts with a change of mind: the deliberate act of the will.

If you are a smoker, you have to throw away the cigarettes and the lighter, and pass by the counter that sells them. Whatever your issue true repentance means that if you are supposed to report to work at 9:00 you report at 8:45. Repentance is about soul maintenance. Mark says that all of Judea and the people of Jerusalem went out (continuous ongoing action) to John. Each one of us needs to repent every day. We have gotten off track. God invites us to come back.

Deut 30:1-5, 2 Chron 7:14, Isa 55:6-7 this is what repentance looks like in the Bible. Our sins are making some of us miserable. Repentance has been difficult, but that is what is required for real progress. You have to get the blocks out of the way. God has a way of pulling back the covering and unmasking the masquerader. You don't have to stay miserable. Enter the New Year ready to receive our God and King.

Peace.

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