

"They Went Out and Preached that People Should Repent"

There is a church down south called "Revolution." That's a rather provocative name for a church. I believe they are trying to capture in the church name the sense of radical mission that Christ's church is involved in. And when we read a passage like this, I hope you get that sense. I hope you get the sense that the church is on a mission. We're involved in a radical mission with a radical message looking to make a revolution. We are part of a revolution of hearts and souls!

You see, when we look at this passage, we see Jesus and his disciples on that mission. They are coming with an urgent message and we see them getting that message out in different ways. And so this passage is about Jesus and his disciples bringing forth this message. But we also see in this chapter that people respond to this message in different ways. This passage especially emphasizes some of the negative ways people respond to this message.

And so as we look at this passage, I'd like to look at three questions about this message. First, what is the message? And so we'll look at what Jesus and his disciples are trying to communicate. Second, how does this message go forth? In other words, who's delivering this message and to where? Third, what is the response to this message? Is it a positive or negative response? So again, first, what is the message? Second, how does this message go forth? And, third, what is the response to this message? As we answer these questions about this passage, we'll learn more about this revolutionary message. We'll see that this message calls for a revolution in our own hearts and souls as well. And we'll see that we are also called us to be a part of the revolution -- in bringing forth this message to the world.

So, first, what is this message? What are Jesus and his disciples trying to convey? Well, I think verse 12 sums up the message nicely. "So they went out and preached that people should repent." Repent. This is not a message that's unique to the disciples. This is the same message that Jesus was teaching. Remember back to chapter 1. Jesus said in Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." We've spent a lot of time looking at how Jesus taught about the coming of the kingdom. That is true. We've talked a lot about how Jesus calls people to respond in faith. That is true. People are especially to believe in him, in Jesus. We see Jesus concerned about faith in this passage as well. But Christ's message also involves a response of *repentance*.

This response of repentance is so central to the message and mission that verse 12 sums up the disciples' preaching by it. Their message was summed up with the word "repent." Jesus and his disciples were calling people to repent. That is a central aspect of the message. This chapter emphasizes this important aspect. Their message was a message of repentance.

Well, let me not assume we all know what that word means. Repentance is not the same word as confession. To confess something is to admit of it. You confess your sins by praying to God and admitting that you have committed certain sins. Repentance typically starts with confession, but it doesn't end there. Repentance is about change. It's about a conversion in your actions and heart. It literally means to change your direction. You are to stop heading down the highway named

“sin,” and instead make a U-turn and go the other way; the way toward righteousness.

Jesus doesn't want us to *just* confess our sins. He is about transformation. That's why he referred to himself as a physician when talking about why he eats with tax collectors and sinners. He came to heal us of our sins. He has come to bring change in our lives. He has come to bring us into his kingdom, a kingdom that comes with power. This is a power that converts us from people who love sin to people who love righteousness. The transformation is not instant. Our forgiveness is instant. We come in faith, and confess our sins, and we are instantly forgiven. But our repentance and change is gradual. We seek to turn from our sins, in response to God's grace, and he works that change in our lives over time. That change will not be complete until after this life, but it will be complete at one point.

So I want you to understand that Jesus message is summarized here in this passage as a call for repentance. And so I want us to keep that aspect of his message in mind as we continue to look at this passage. This passage especially emphasizes that aspect of the message: that Christ calls us to repent.

So, let's look then at how this message goes forth. We see first in this passage that Jesus is bringing it to his hometown of Nazareth. He goes into the local synagogue on the Sabbath and begins to teach to the people. Notice that these people seem to know him personally. So Jesus is bringing the message to people from his own town, friends, family, neighbors - a number of people who knew him and his family personally.

Next we see that Jesus brings this message to the villages in the area, in verse 6. He basically goes on a preaching circuit, going from town to town, ministering to each place. This is not the first time we see Jesus doing itinerant preaching in Mark. Mark 1:39 records Jesus basically doing the same thing throughout Galilee. This is pretty much the sense we have gotten through Mark. We've seen Jesus on the move with his disciples, proclaiming the message of the coming kingdom, calling people to repent.

But in this passage we see another development in how the message is going forth. In verse seven he calls the twelve disciples together and sends them out to proclaim the message. This should not surprise us. When he appointed the twelve back in chapter 3, one of the reasons that was given for their appointment was so that they could be sent out to preach. Here that begins to be fulfilled. We're not told exactly where they were sent, but Jesus' instructions to them regarding staying at people's houses suggests that they were being sent out to preach from town to town, on a circuit, just like Jesus had been doing. They had been with Jesus as he had been doing his ministry, watching and learning how Jesus had been doing it, and now they were being sent out on their first mission.

And as they were sent out, notice that they were being authorized for ministry by Jesus. Later in this chapter, in verse 30, when they return from their mission they are described as “apostles.” This was a technical term of the day that referred to people commissioned as an ambassador for someone else. The disciples were being commissioned to represent Jesus, to speak on his behalf and to represent him. This sort of commission meant that the disciples had been given full authority and power for this purpose. That is what this role of an apostle meant.

And we see this confirmed in verse 7. In verse 7, Jesus gives them authority over the unclean spirits. They obviously went with Jesus' power to heal as well, because in verse 13 we see that they not only cast out many demons, but also healed

many people. So Jesus empowers the disciples. He makes them his authorized representatives. That is why the disciples are doing what he is doing. They are proclaiming the same message of repentance. And they are showing forth the coming of the kingdom through these acts of power: healing people and casting out demons!

Notice the requirements that Jesus gives the disciples for their journey. He restricts them from taking anything on their mission, except the bare essentials. That's what the staff and the sandals and the one tunic would have represented. They were not to take anything to feed themselves with, not even money. They weren't to take a second tunic, which would normally have been used at night for some shelter if you didn't have a place to stay. Instead they were to trust God for their provision – that he would provide people to welcome them with hospitality in the towns they entered. Jesus' restrictions also give a sense of urgency to their mission – there's no time to plan or even pack, instead they must go! Go to the towns and proclaim this important message! There will be time to worry about food and shelter later. Now you must go! The mission is urgent and the message is critical!

Many commentators find allusion to the first Passover in the Old Testament here. Exodus 12:11 says, "In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover." The Passover was a sign of impending judgment on Egypt. And the people were to eat in haste, with their belts fastened, their sandals on, and their staff in their hand, because as soon as the judgment came, they were to be ready to leave the land of Egypt. The disciples too, were to be in a hurry, letting people know of an impending judgment, and calling people to repentance. Everyone was to be ready for the coming of God's kingdom. In light of its coming, Jesus and the disciples were calling people to repent.

So in our passage we see that the message went forth in several ways. Jesus brought it to his hometown. He brought it from village to village. And he sent his disciples out to themselves go from town to town. And notice one other way that the message was going out: verse 15 talks about King Herod, and it says that he had heard about Jesus. Mark then spends 16 verses to tell us about King Herod and his killing of John the Baptist. But after that, in verse 30, we see that the apostles return from their mission. In other words, Mark paints the picture that as a result of the apostles' mission, people all over were starting to hear about Jesus. The word was getting out about Jesus. The message of repentance was going forth, even to people like King Herod, who clearly was someone who needed repentance. And of course, everyone needs this message of repentance. We've all sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

So we've looked briefly at this message. We've looked at how this message was going forth. Now let's look at our third question about this passage: What was the response to this message? Well, our passage shows that there were different responses. Look at the response of the people in Jesus' hometown. This was not a positive response. Essentially, the people in Jesus' hometown, the people who knew him the best, rejected him. Notice first, that there was a lack of faith. Verse 6 says that Jesus marveled at their unbelief. All through Mark we see people amazed and marveling at what Jesus was doing. But here the response is the opposite. Because there was such a lack of faith, Jesus did not do very many miracles – he just healed a few sick people. And so instead of seeing people amazed and marveling at Jesus' miracles, it is Jesus himself who is amazed. He is marveling at the lack of faith from people in his own hometown.

Verse 5 actually says that Jesus was *not able* to do any work of power among them. Now this is not because of an inherent inability of God. Certainly God is all

powerful, and so Jesus could have done more mighty miracles there if he wanted to. But the point is that Jesus executed his miracles in response to faith. When there was not faith, Jesus would not execute them. It seems part of the very ministry constraints that he imposed himself. We see this when at other times people asked Jesus for a sign. At other times, people ask Jesus for a sign to prove himself, and Jesus refused. Not because Jesus couldn't do a sign, but that he wouldn't give one in light of their unbelief.

So my point is that the primary response by the people in Jesus' hometown is unbelief. They doubted Jesus' claims. They would not believe in him. This response of unbelief then produced another negative response. They became offended at him. That's what it says in verse 3; they were offended. And look at their rationale. They said, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?"

I guess we can understand their response a little bit. They were a bit taken aback. Here this man Jesus whom they had watched grow up before them, suddenly comes back after his long journey and starts preaching a message of repentance. He was clearly teaching this from the Scriptures. They weren't sure where he was getting all of this. But when they started to really hear his message, this message of repentance, they began to be offended. Who is this man calling us to repent? Who does he think he is? What authority or right does he have to tell us these things? Isn't he the carpenter? Of course a carpenter was someone who worked with his hands, just like most everyone else in the town. So this would have basically been a derogatory statement toward Jesus. He's no one special - just a carpenter.

Notice that they also describe Jesus as being the son of Mary. That's actually not the common way of describing someone. Usually you'd refer to someone's father, not their mother. King David was the son of Jesse, for example. Some have suggested that this meant that Joseph had already died, but there's not good evidence for such a convention - to start referring to the mother after the father died. Instead, a more provocative suggestion has been made that maybe they were raising a question about the legitimacy of his birth. Remember, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. She was carrying a child before Joseph and she were even married. Surely rumors would have circulated, despite Joseph's efforts to maintain Mary's dignity. And so the people's question here might have been another derogatory statement toward Jesus - raising a question over the legitimacy of his birth.

And remember this is not the first time that these sorts of questions were asked. In chapter 3, when he went home, some of those close to him wondered if he was out of his mind. His own mother and brothers came to bring him back home away from the crowds and ministry. And so the people were asking the right question: who is this Jesus? Unfortunately, it seems they were coming up with the wrong answer. Here, in this passage, they ask this question of who is Jesus, and they answer with derogatory remarks. The result is that they are offended, and do not believe in him or in his message. The conclusion: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." Jesus quotes a well known saying to describe the situation. People who should have known Jesus the best, thought they did, but in reality they didn't know him at all.

A similar sort of response is also implied in our passage concerning the disciple's mission. Jesus tells the twelve disciples to be prepared for certain people and certain towns to reject their ministry. That's a scary thought since Jesus also told them to rely on the hospitality of the people whom they go to.

In light of that possible rejection, Jesus instructs the twelve to shake the dust off their feet when it happens. This was to serve as a testimony or witness against them. This explains why Jesus sent them out in groups of two. In the Old Testament law we see that the law required two or three witnesses to establish the validity of something. And so the disciples are going out as eye witnesses. They are testifying to the coming of Jesus and his ministry. They are testifying to his message which calls for repentance. And if needed, they would testify to the people's rejection. If the people would not receive the message, they would stand condemned. They would stand condemned because two witnesses confirmed the message, and two witnesses could then confirm that they had received the message and rejected it.

The shaking off the dust from their feet was an especially powerful statement. The Jews had a custom that when they would leave foreign gentile lands, they would shake the dust off their feet. They did this as a sign that they didn't want to take back anything that was unclean from those pagan lands. They were returning to the holy land of Israel, a place where God's ceremonial laws of cleanness visibly separated the Jews from the Gentiles. This marked off God's people from the pagans.

So think about what this would convey when the disciples did this to other Jews. It was telling these Jews who rejected Jesus' message that they were no longer part of God's people. It was saying that they were as good as the pagan nations, cut off from God's people and his covenants. This is a dramatic statement in the big picture of redemptive history. A time was coming, and was already there, where God's people would not be divided upon ethnic lines, Jew or Gentile, but upon the lines of faith; faith in Jesus!

And so in our passage, we see a lot about the negative rejection of people to the message of repentance brought by Jesus and the disciples. Of course, our passage assumes that there will be a positive response as well. The very fact that Jesus tells the disciples to stay at peoples' homes along the way, assumes that some people will welcome the disciples. And the passage doesn't tell us about how Jesus' own circuit of preaching went, but surely he was welcomed in the ways that he had been in the past in other towns. And in verse 31, after the apostles return, Jesus tells them to escape away and get some rest, because the crowds were overwhelming them as well. So obviously there were people who were positively responding to their message.

But nonetheless, the emphasis in this chapter seems to be on the negative response. Mark is highlighting that both Jesus and his disciples faced rejection and opposition. People would reject the gospel because they are offended by it. And doesn't this look forward to the cross? The rejection of Jesus by his "own" here, his own townspeople and kin, looks forward to the cross. For Jesus had come to his "own". He had come to Israel, the nation chosen out of all the other nations to be God's special people. Jesus, the Son of God, was rejected by Israel; chosen Israel! But to those who reject Jesus, he shakes the dust off his feet, and says you are not my people. But to those who do receive him, he gives the right to become children of God!

And so I'd like to apply this passage to us from two perspectives. First, I'd like to apply this passage to us from the perspective of receiving this message. We are first and foremost recipients of this message. Each of us has received Christ's call to repentance and faith. And I'd like to focus for a moment on this aspect of repentance. Christ has called us each to repent. He calls us to analyze our lives and realize that we are sinners. He calls us to begin to hate that sin just as he

hates it. He calls us to turn away from it. He wants us to change. He wants to change us.

My question for you is, does this offend you? Does it make you want to reject the message and the messengers when you hear that Jesus is not content to let you remain in your sin? That he wants you to turn from your sins? Does that offend you? Is that the Jesus that you know? You see, we often think about how Jesus loves us. That is true. We think about his grace to us. That is true. But his love and grace is partly expressed in his call for change in our lives. He wants us to grow and to be grown. Complacency is not an option for a Christian. Being "okay" with our sins is not an option.

Again, does this offend you? If so, the question boils down to who is Jesus? If he is just a carpenter, just some bastard child, then go ahead and be offended. Go ahead and reject him and his message of repentance. But if he is the eternal Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered, died, and was buried, so that we could be forgiven of our sins; if he is the one who now calls us to turn away from our sins, how can we be angry or offended? And how can we be offended at his authorized messengers? How can we be offended at those who proclaim this message of repentance on his behalf? If they are being faithful to this message, how can we be angry or offended at them? If you are angry and offended at Jesus' call to repentance, then I urge you to search your heart. Repent even of your anger and offense, and believe in him! You see, everything boils down to who Jesus is!

So the second perspective I'd like us to consider in applying this text is the perspective of giving the message; the perspective of giving the message. We, the church, are called to bring this message to the world. We are part of the revolution. The church is Christ's authorized representative and ambassador to the world. And so as we apply this passage to us, we are reminded that this job is tough. It's a hard job. Sometimes people will reject it. Often people will reject it. This is true for all sorts of people, but how often is it true for those closest to us. Those who are closest to us, who have seen God at work in our lives, often reject the message. It's so amazing and sad that people who have seen God transforming our lives, still reject the message of the gospel. And the reality is, that we stand as a testimony against them. We are a testimony against everyone who rejects us, sadly even to our family members.

We might not shake the dust off our feet anymore to those who reject us; that symbolism really only applied to the historical situation with the Jewish people at that time. But we do have a God-given symbol of that sort of separation. We do have a symbol of our separation from the rest of the world. We see that before us today, at the table of the Lord. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, it's exclusive. It's only for God's people. It marks us out as God's people, and calls everyone else to come to Jesus in faith and repentance.

And as we share the message to others, we should take heart. This passage should encourage us. Jesus sent out the disciples in an urgent mission, telling them to rely on other's hospitality to meet their needs. Essentially they were told to rely on God's divine providence to provide for them. Now this is not a formula to not prepare. This is not a model for missions that we should not plan ahead or send our missionaries out with provisions. But it is a reminder that the work of the message going forth is ultimately by God's design. He is working through our delivery of the message. If that is the case, then surely he will meet our needs. And if the kingdom came with power through the apostles, in an extraordinary way, then certainly we should be encouraged that God will work powerfully through our delivery of the message to change people's lives, to bring them to faith, to grow

them and change them by his grace. Yes, many will reject our message. But some will hear and believe, repent of their sins, and turn to Christ.

We are each here as a testimony to that. We are witnesses that God does that, because he did that in our own lives. We are all "converts," people who have turned in faith, people who strive to repent of our sins, by the power of Christ working in our lives. That is our testimony. Praise be to Jesus, the carpenter who built the world, the son who is the Son of God, the one who also calls us his brothers and sisters. Amen.

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