

Mark 1

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Preacher: B Maiden

[0 : 00] Well, nice to see everybody again. And Paul, I don't think, explained that I'm actually retired.! I'm not a minister at the moment.

Probably will never be again. I'm retired. I retired back in 2013. And I'm still an elder at the church there in Kendall.

But we've got a slightly, well, a very younger, faster than I am, which is a great thing. So I want to carry on from where we left off this morning.

Let's just pray before we do that. Heavenly Father, we thank you for this parable, this parable of the sower. We thank you for what we learned this morning about the different kinds of responses to your word, the hard response, the shallow response, and the overcrowded response, none of which bear fruit.

And we pray now that as we come to the good soil, the good ground, the ground that bears fruit, the fertile soil, we pray, Lord, that you'd help us to understand your word.

[1 : 10] Speak to us by your spirit, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. So I want to speak tonight about two very important words.

These two words should always go together. They're like hinges on the door, two hinges on the door. They're like the wings of a bird or an airplane.

You need both. And you should never think of the one without thinking of the other. And they're very important words because Jesus used them at the very outset of his ministry.

He began to preach in Galilee after the imprisonment of John the Baptist. And Matthew summarizes his message and Mark summarizes his message and so does Luke.

And they all agree that the message of Jesus right at the beginning of his ministry, the words that sum up in some ways his ministry were these.

[2 : 17] Repent and believe the good news. Repent and believe. The time has come, he said. That means the decisive, long-promised moment that God has been preparing his people for throughout the Old Testament period for centuries.

People had been, the Jewish people had been looking forward to the coming of God's kingdom. And Jesus arrived in Galilee and he said, it's here.

It's come. The king has come. And the time that God's people have been waiting for has come. The kingdom of God has come near.

And therefore, repent and believe the good news. In those days, kings were really important. And they had a lot of power. Royalty in those days wasn't like royalty today.

Kings and queens these days don't have much power. They're just tourist attractions. And they don't have much power. But a king in New Testament times had the power of life and death.

[3 : 34] His word was law. And Jesus said, the king has come. I'm here. The Messiah, the Christ. God's anointed one. The king has come. The kingdom is here.

And you prepare for the arrival of a king. My wife was telling me how when she was a little girl in Salford, which is, well, it was quite a grimy northwestern Lancashire town.

I'm sure you'll forgive me for saying that, Jim. But it was. And she was telling me that when the queen visited Salford, they were actually cleaning the pavements on which she was going to walk. You prepare. And you prepare well for the coming of royalty. And Jesus is saying here, royalty is here.

God's king has come. The kingdom is here. You'd better get ready. You'd better prepare. And how do you prepare for the coming of the king?

[4 : 44] You prepare for the arrival of the king by repenting and believing. You don't just shrug your shoulders when you hear these words and say, well, that's nothing to do with me.

We're talking about a king with the power of life and death. And this king says to you tonight and says to me, repent and believe the good news.

There are a wide range of phrases which Christians use nowadays to describe how to respond to Jesus. We talk sometimes about becoming a Christian.

The New Testament, as far as I know, doesn't use that language. The New Testament never tells us to become a Christian. In fact, the word Christian only occurs three times in the New Testament. And in each case, it's clear that it was used as a nickname for believers in Jesus by pagans, by non-Christians. There's nothing wrong with talking about becoming a Christian, but that is not how the New Testament describes it.

[5 : 54] We talk sometimes, I remember I was taught as a little child in a Christian home, to ask Jesus into my heart. Well, the Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians and prays that the Spirit would cause the Lord Jesus Christ to dwell in their hearts, as the owner-occupier of their heart, and to fill them with the knowledge of God's love.

But that was written to a church. I don't think there's anything terribly wrong with telling people to ask Jesus into their hearts, but it's not the language that the New Testament uses it.

We talk about making a commitment. We talk about making a decision for Christ. The New Testament doesn't use these expressions. What does the New Testament say we should do in response to Jesus?

It says we should repent and we should believe. So that's what we should do. We should repent and we should believe.

That's how we become a Christian. I've just used that expression myself. That's how we respond to Jesus initially. And that's how we go on responding to Jesus.

[7 : 09] We go on repenting and we go on believing. That is the response to Jesus Christ. Repent and believe. Those are the two words I want to talk about tonight.

I want to talk first of all about repenting. John the Baptist prepared for the arrival of Jesus by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin.

Jesus said unless you repent, you will perish. After his resurrection, Jesus sent out the church to the world.

And he said repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations. On the day of Pentecost, Simon Peter, after the very first ever Christian sermon, was asked by the hearers what they should do.

And his response was to say repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul preaching to the philosophers at Athens.

[8 : 18] He said God now commands all people everywhere to repent. So it's pretty clear, isn't it? The response to Jesus, first of all, is to repent.

So what does it mean to repent? Well, the Old Testament word means just to turn. To turn, that's it. To turn. To turn around. The New Testament word means to have a different mind altogether.

A complete reorientation of your thinking. Let's just focus on that word to turn. You've got to realize that you're going in completely the wrong direction.

And if you carry on going in that direction, it will end in disaster. And therefore, you turn around. I remember some years ago now, preaching at Ingleton Evangelical Church, which is 18 miles east of Kendall.

I live in a lovely place. We've got the Lake District to the west and north of us. And to the east of us, we've got the Yorkshire Dales. And we're right there in the middle between the two.

[9 : 34] And I was preaching one Sunday at Ingleton Evangelical Church. So I needed to travel 18 miles east. And there's Kendall.

There's Ingleton, okay? On a map of England, which I'm asking you to imagine. And between the two is the M6 motorway. And if you go north, you go to Carlisle. If you go south, you go to Lancaster and Preston and places like that.

And I was worrying about a children's talk I had to give at Ingleton Evangelical Church. If only people realized the stress that they caused preachers when they asked for children's talks in their meetings.

And I was stressing about this children's talk. I was going through it in my mind. And I sort of woke up and found myself driving south down the M6 towards Lancaster and Preston and eventually

London and places like that.

And I thought, why am I doing this? I'd just done it without thinking. It was just automatic. That's normally what I did at that particular roundabout.

[10:50] And I hadn't been concentrating properly. And, well, what did I do? Well, you're not actually allowed to do a U-turn on a motorway, as you probably know.

And you're not allowed to reverse down the motorway either, just in case you thought that was a possible way out of the problem. I had to go, oh, maybe 10 miles further north.

And then turn around at the next roundabout. Go all the way 10 miles further back. And then get on the right way to Ingleton. And I arrived during the first hymn.

And the lady on the door looked extremely pleased to see me. A bit like the father in the parable of the prodigal son. She ran and fell on my neck.

Well, no, she didn't, actually. I was going to say she kissed me. She didn't do that. But we had a real handshake. And she was very pleased to see me. I turned around.

[11:55] That's what you do when you repent. You turn around. So repentance means turning from everything that displeases Jesus.

He's the king. So you turn from everything that isn't his will. Everything that he doesn't want. You stop distancing yourself from Jesus.

Instead of running away from him, you run to him. You stop ignoring him. You stop disobeying him.

You're sorry and ashamed at the way you behave and the way you think and the way you speak.

You come to see that you're disobeying God in thought and word and deed. We're doing those things that we ought not to do. And we're not doing those things that we ought to do.

And we come to see this and it burdens us. It deeply concerns us. We've not loved God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We've not loved our neighbor as ourself.

[13:08] We don't love our neighbors as we love ourselves, as God tells us to. We love ourselves. Everything we do is tainted by self-love, by pride, even the good things we do.

We feel proud when we do them. We love ourselves when we do them. We even self-righteously condemn others for the sins we know we commit ourselves.

And it makes us feel better about our own sins when we condemn them in other people. We're sinner. King Jesus has given his manifesto.

We call it the Sermon on the Mount. It's the manifesto for the kingdom of God. I'll just take you briefly through the Sermon on the Mount. Very, very briefly through the Sermon on the Mount.

I think you should read the Sermon on the Mount two or three times this week. Read it carefully. Read it prayerfully. And ask yourself what you should be repenting of.

[14:17] We're not poor in spirit. We're not meek and humble. We do not hunger and thirst after righteousness. We're not starving.

We're not ravenous for righteousness. We're not merciful. We're much harder on other sinners than we are on ourselves. We're not forgiving.

We're not pure in heart. We're not peacemakers. We don't go around trying to reconcile ourselves to people who we may have wronged or who we think have wronged us.

We don't try and reconcile other people to each other. We don't seek peace and pursue it like a hound pursues a fox.

We're not persecuted for Jesus' sake. I'm just going through the Beatitudes here. We're not persecuted for Jesus' sake. We're afraid to openly confess our Savior.

[15:20] We harbor anger and resentment in our hearts. We belittle other people with our words. We refuse to seriously seek reconciliation.

Jesus told us if we go to church, He actually said if you were about to offer a sacrifice, but in New Testament times it would be if you're going to church and you realize your brother has got something against you, there's something not right between you and somebody else there, you should go.

You don't wait until they come to you. You should go and be reconciled to them and then come and worship God. We don't do that.

We play around with lust. We don't even behave rightly towards our spouses. We're not totally honest and truthful, so that our yes means yes and our no means no.

We repay evil with evil in all kinds of different ways. We don't love our enemies. We don't pray for them.

[16 : 36] We don't pray as we should have done, and when we do pray, it's mainly about ourselves and our families and our physical needs. We don't pray with God at the center.

We don't give generously to the poor. We pretend to be more godly than we really are. We're friendly to those who are friendly to us, but not particularly friendly to those who aren't friendly to us. We set our hearts on earthly success. We lay up treasure on earth instead of laying it up in heaven. Earthly success, earthly treasure occupies our thoughts all the time.

It's what we get anxious about. It's what we get worried about. We condemn others. We're far more concerned about the faults and the sins of other people rather than our own sins as a way of feeling good about ourselves or better about ourselves.

We're always judging others and criticizing others and gossiping about others. We don't gossip about ourselves. No, we gossip about others. We imagine that we're more righteous than they are.

[17 : 53] We do not do to others what they would like them to do to us. I've just taken you quickly through the Sermon on the Mount. Read it two or three times this week and honestly examine yourself in the light of it and repent and grieve that you are not like this.

You haven't even started. And more than anything else, you want to be forgiven of all the rottenness in your heart.

So you see, repentance isn't just praying the prayer or making some kind of superficial decision. It is a deep, life-changing realization that you are going completely in the wrong direction.

You're not as Jesus wants you to be and you're appalled at your state of heart and you're far more concerned about the sins of others than about your own sins.

Sorry, you're far more concerned about your own sins than you are about the sins of others when you've repented. What you want more than anything else is God's mercy, God's forgiveness.

[19 : 19] The best picture, of course, that I know of, of repentance in the New Testament is that lost son, so-called, that lost son who forsook his father and his father's house, left home, spent his father's inheritance, wished his father was dead, and actually told his father so.

He actually said, give me my inheritance now. I can't wait for you to die. And he then took that inheritance off into a far country, spent it all in no time, according to his brother on prostitutes, amongst other things, ending up in a time of famine, longing to feed himself with the pig's food. And then he came to his senses and he turned around and he went all the way home. Father, I have sinned.

His elder brother thought he didn't have much to repent of. And he resented his brother coming home and he resented even more his father throwing this party for him.

And he refused to go in. And it was him who was outside the father's house, not the so-called lost son. It was the elder brother who thought he had nothing to repent of very much, who turned out to be the lost son in that parable.

[20 : 48] So that's what it means to repent. It means to turn around. But Jesus comes to this other word, believe.

Believe the good news. Or it says in the version that you have, believe the gospel, which means great news, fantastic news. So he summons us to repent and then he tells us to believe the good news.

Well, what's the good news? Not good news so far. So far, all we've heard is that we're just sinners who need mercy. What's the good news? Well, the good news is that God's kingdom is for the repentant.

It is for repentant rebels. It is for people who repent. That's the good news. This king, and he is a king, never forget that.

He is also called the friend of sinners. He is the friend of sinners. He is on the side of sinners. He came into this world to save, rescue sinners.

[22 : 03] He calls sinners to repentance. He didn't come to call the righteous. That's good news, isn't it? Because I'm not righteous.

He didn't come to call the righteous. He came to call the sinners. He's like a doctor. Doctors aren't here for the healthy. Doctors are here for the sick.

And Jesus says, it's the sick who need a doctor. And I'm a doctor and I've come for the sick. I've come for the sinners. sinners. That's the good news.

He came to save his people from their sins. He died the death that sinners deserve to die. He rose again on their behalf as their in union with them.

And therefore, all those who believe in Jesus, his death is their death. and his resurrection is and will be their resurrection. Jesus is the friend of sinners.

[23 : 10] And he calls sinners to himself for salvation. So you've got to believe that. You've got to believe the good news.

The New Testament is absolutely packed with this. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, said the Apostle Paul to the Philippian jailer. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. John is full of it. John's gospel. God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And at the end of his gospel he says, I've written all this so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ and by believing you might have life in his name.

And Thomas, he says to Thomas, Thomas you've only believed because you've seen me. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. The New Testament is full of it. The Apostle Paul is full of it.

[24 : 17] We are justified. We are freed from condemnation in God's sight by faith, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. So what does it mean to believe in Jesus?

Well, yes, it includes believing the facts about Jesus. It means, it includes believing that the New Testament is an historical record of his life and death and resurrection.

Believing the facts about Jesus. You've got to do that obviously in order to believe in Jesus. And sometimes we use the word just like that. We use it in the same sense as we might say I believe in the Loch Ness Monster or I don't believe in the Loch Ness Monster.

Some people do, some people don't. I don't. My wife and I went for our honeymoon to Durham where the Loch Ness Monster is supposed to appear regularly and we didn't see a thing.

So we are not believers in the Loch Ness Monster. It includes believing that the story of Jesus is true and may I assure you if there's any doubters here that there's loads of evidence for this one.

[25 : 34] Far more evidence than there is for the Loch Ness Monster. There's loads of evidence for the death, for the life and the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There's absolutely no shortage of evidence and if anyone tells you there's no evidence they just haven't looked at it, that's all. They haven't really looked at the evidence. So if there's anybody here who's got a problem about that talk to me afterwards and I'll take you through some of the evidence. So yeah, it means believing the facts about Jesus but it means much more than that. The word believe in the New Testament means to trust, to rely on personally, to depend on personally, to trust the person, the words, the death, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To trust ourselves completely to Him and just to say to Him, I can't do it. You know what I'm like. I can't do it but you can do it for me and I trust you to do it.

trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, relying on His death for our sins, believing that His sacrifice on the cross is sufficient to cover all our sins no matter how wicked we may have been, no matter how long we may have rebelled against Him and closed our hearts to Him.

[27 : 04] He calls us now to believe in Him and He will save us if we do. It is to rely and trust, rely upon and to trust in His grace and His love and His mercy which is greater than all our sins.

It is to rely on His resurrection from the dead as our hope for the future and it's to stop relying on anything else. That's what it means to believe in Jesus.

There are some other words that the New Testament sometimes uses instead of faith, coming to Jesus.

Remember what I said about turning round? Coming, instead of distancing ourselves from Him, coming to Jesus. Come to Jesus.

Lepers came to Jesus. They couldn't do anything at all themselves about their leprosy but they came to Jesus for cleansing. All sorts of people came to Jesus and He never turned any of them away ever and if you come to Him He won't turn you away either.

[28 : 26] He invites people to come to Him. Come unto Me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. He invites you to come to Him this evening.

The New Testament also talks about receiving Jesus. Receiving Jesus. It actually says that we've got to receive Jesus like little children.

Little children love receiving things. Have you noticed that? I've got some grandchildren and I've had two children of my own and every Christmas we used to give them gifts like parents do and not once did either of my two children come to me and say Dad you've just been too generous this year

can't accept all this and if I do accept all of it I'll at least have to pay for some of it. No chance absolutely no chance at all. They never ever spoke to me in those terms. They just said they didn't even say thank you they just said let's bring it on more and more. They love receiving things. Children love receiving things. That's how you've got to come to Jesus. You've come to receive what he's done.

[29 : 56] New Testament talks about following him following him and that's important. If you really come to Jesus if you really turn from yourself to Jesus you will follow him you want to please him you want to be led by him your whole life.

Near where I live is Morecambe Bay and Morecambe Bay is quite a dangerous area there are lots of quicksand but there is a way across Morecambe Bay and there's a man who's just retired he was called Cedric and he used to lead walks across Morecambe Bay he used to go in a tractor actually and maybe 200 people would follow the tractor and he would take them from Arnside to the other side of the bay to Grange over Sand but the point is you had to follow him if you trusted Cedric you followed him you didn't say oh I know better than Cedric you didn't wander off if you did you'd end up being swallowed up by quicksand honestly you followed Cedric he was the guide and he knew the way and because you believed in him because you trusted him you followed him and that's what you will do if you trusted

Jesus New Testament also talks about feeding on Jesus and drinking of Jesus and that's a lovely picture particularly in the light of the Lord's Supper which is coming up soon it is a lovely picture of trusting in Jesus my wife makes lovely apple pie so does Paul's wife actually because we had a bit at lunchtime they both make lovely apple pie I'm telling you that you can believe that with your head ask my wife and she might even give you a recipe you can believe the recipe you can understand the recipe you can even make an apple pie but if you don't eat it you'll never taste how good it is you've got to take the Lord Jesus as it were to yourself by faith eat and drink anyone who comes to me will never thirst again there's a man called Alfred Wainwright who before he died lived in Kendall he was the treasurer of the council and he was absolutely mad on the Lake District and he went up every

Lake District peak and he wrote a guidebook both with pen and ink on every Lake District mountain and his books sell like hot potatoes now and you could become an expert on the Lake District just by reading Wainwright's guidebook you could spend your winter evenings by the fire reading up about the different paths of Skidda and Scorfell and Helvellyn and so on you could know all about it by reading Wainwright's guidebook but unless you get up and get out onto those fowls you'll never experience what it like to look out from the top of Helvellyn and see all those peaks and all those lakes below you that's what it means to believe not just head knowledge but acting on what you know so repent and believe

I want to say just two things before I I'm really finished but I want before I sit down I want to say two very important things the first of these two very important things is that repenting and believing in Jesus are ongoing those who repent and believe in Jesus continue to repent and believe in Jesus in fact their repentance and their faith deepens as the longer they are following Jesus the longer they're Christians the more their repentance and their faith deepens and Hebrews chapter 11 is quite clear about this believers continue to believe they believe until they die they die in faith [34 : 52] Hebrews chapter 11 and that is the mark of true faith and true repentance that it continue as we were thinking this morning it doesn't fizzle out it doesn't get choked by thorns and thistles if it's true faith those who repent and believe continue to repent and believe and I come now to the second of the two final important points and it follows really from what I've just said that repentance and faith are not just the way we start the Christian life they are how we continue the Christian life when I was a young Christian when I was a teenager and maybe in my early 20s there used to be all kinds of theories and formula how to live what was called a victorious Christian life and there were different groups and different speakers and different conventions and different books and they all had their particular catchphrases or even the word secret was used the secret of living a victorious

Christian life and I used to go from one to the other because I was aware that I wasn't doing particularly well living the Christian life I used to go from one to the other seeking this secret of how to live a victorious Christian life which is not an expression I really approve of because a victorious Christian life would be a sinless life if you sin and you do every day you would fail you of not being victorious so this victorious Christian life that I was seeking and this secret that I was seeking I wish

I hadn't bothered to be honest with you I wish that I hadn't gone through that stage in my life because there is no quick fix there is no secret it's not a secret at all the way you respond to Jesus and the way you continue to respond to Jesus is repentance and faith you carry on as you began repentance and faith that's all go on repenting go on believing go on preaching the same gospel to yourself every day you need it every day because you'll sin sadly every day in thought or word or deed go on repenting go on trusting in the promises of Jesus examine yourself search your heart every day ask God to show you what you need to repent of read the sermon on the mount two or three times this week ask him to show you and keep repenting and keep trusting Jesus the friend of sinners as we've just heard from Paul he doesn't write you off every time you fail he is the friend of sinners keep looking to him keep relying on him relying on his grace trusting in him asking him to go on cleansing you from all unrighteousness preach the gospel to yourself every day there's nothing else it's not a secret it is not a secret this is all you need until you get to glory turn from sin every day and turn to
Jesus repent and believe and go on repenting and go on believing amen to to to to!
to