repentance, calling, enlightenment, preaching, kingdom of God

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INTRODUCTION:

Our text says that after John the Baptist’s imprisonment, Jesus started preaching the same message John preached: “Repent!” [repentance is metanoia: “a changed mind, changed thinking”; G.Campbell Morgan: “Through all the messages of history, utterances of prophets, visions of seers, and songs of psalmists, the almost monotonous burden of the Divine call is, Repent, repent.”]

–Preaching is a mixture of instructing the mind through explanation and inspiring the heart through exhortation. But neither are effective without the human will’s response to the Holy Spirit’s conviction.

–Minds must be changed for lives to be changed. That’s why Christ started where John left off: HOM.idea. He had to begin His own preaching ministry by continuing John’s, because....

I. The Way of the Lord Was Not Fully Prepared—Mat 3:1-3. In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: “A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’” (John’s voice came but was silenced.)

A. v.12, When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. (When a door closes in God’s face, He finds an open one.)

1. It was in Galilee, not Judea, that Jesus selected His 12 Apostles.

2. Where God isn’t welcome, He doesn’t abide—v.13a, Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum. [Questions: Is God at home in our hearts? Do we live in such a way that He always feels welcome there?]

B. Ever since the Cross, the way of the Lord is still being prepared:

1. Jesus took up John’s message and got treated like John.

2. The disciples suffered persecution for preaching as Jesus did.

3. Missionaries have been martyred for this message of repentance.

TRANS: Preaching “Repent!” is where Jesus began and also where we must begin, whether addressing individuals, families, cities, or nations. Repentance isn’t the only message, but it’s the forerunner of faith in anything else God has to say. Jesus has much to teach, but He teaches us very little until we repent. Why does Jesus begin there?

II. Repentance Is the Proper Response to God’s Light—v.13-16. 

...he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along 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.”

A. Why did Jesus make Galilee of the Gentiles His 1st preaching circuit?

1. This international setting pointed to the Gospel’s future (Greeks, Phoenicians, and Arabs were the majority; the Jews a minority.)

2. Judea was closed-minded. Galilee was open to new ideas:

   a. Holy Spirit conviction is meant to give us God’s viewpoint, not just to make us sorry for our sins (Where there’s no change of mind, there’s no choice to change our ways [from Lewis Carroll’s “The Walrus and the Carpenter” – “I weep for you,” the Walrus said; “I deeply sympathize.” / With sobs and tears he sorted out / Those of the largest size, / Holding his pocket handkerchief / Before his streaming eyes.]

   b. Repentance isn’t just considering God’s way of thinking, but choosing to adopt God’s attitude about sin and selfishness.)

3. Judea was isolated, ingrown and self-addicted [Barclay said Judea was “on the road to nowhere,” Galilee was “on the road to everywhere.”]

B. Enlightenment informs openness (Galilee was open, yet still dark).

1. We can be living in darkness, if not receptive to God’s light on:

   a. our origin: living life without knowing our significance (only God can tell us who we are: images of His Triune Deity);

   b. our purpose: adopting popular behavior, without seeing our sin (only God can show us how to live: by His Word);

   c. our destiny: following trivial pursuits, without finding ultimate fulfillment: a personal relationship with our Creator.

2. “living in the land of the shadow of death” was a double-prophecy:

   a. Isaiah’s prophecy had promised deliverance from Assyria at the birth of a child named Immanuel (“God with us”).

   b. But the second fulfillment came when “a light...dawned” in the ministry of another Immanuel—John 8:12. When Jesus spoke again as Jesus did.

   c. His “light of life” came in two ways—Mat 4:23. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (The “good news” brought God’s light; “healing” showed His power.)
TRANS: Repentance is our proper response to God’s light shining into our lives, whether from spiritual truth or miraculous healing. When Christ’s light breaks in, there’s always more where that came from. But we must repent. Jesus has much more to show us, but shows us little more until we live in the light of what He’s already shown us.

“Repent! Repent!” is our Lord’s cry for a final reason....

III. The King Had Already Arrived— v.17, From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

A. Jesus was His own herald (“to preach” means “to proclaim as a herald”):
   1. He spoke with certainty (no perhaps, no maybes, no probablys)
   2. He spoke with authority (with the counsels and edicts of a King)

B. From studying them for 30 years, He knew what sinners needed:
   1. To common people He had grown up with, He cried: “Repent!”
   2. For passersby on the great trade-route near to Nazareth [Hebrew priests & scribes, Roman soldiers & citizens, Arab travelers & merchants, Greek philosophers & slaves] He had one word for each, “Repent!”

C. God’s reign was about to begin (earlier than expected!)
   1. The future King of the universe had become present in history!
   2. We aren’t prepared for this King, if God isn’t first in our hearts:
      a. Changing our ways means a radical and revolutionary change of mind about Who’s in charge of our lives—Who is King!
      b. Changing the mind is a decisional turning point:
         (1) turning from our own ways, to walk only in God’s ways,
         (2) closing worldly trust accounts, to invest faith solely in God,
         (3) reversing course by resetting our sails to catch the wind of the Holy Spirit instead of the shifting winds of the world.

CONCLUSION:
– Repentance is faith’s forerunner, faith’s condition. There’s so much God wants to teach us about His ways, His Kingdom, but first we must change our minds, change our directions: repent.
– So, the questions we must continually ask ourselves are these: Whose wind is filling our sails?.... In whose account is our faith invested?.... To which drummer do our feet march? If God is not first in our thinking, first in our devotion, Jesus says to us, “Repent!”

Matthew 4:12-17 (NIV)
12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali-- 14 to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 15 “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- 16 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.” 17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”