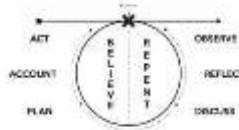


Mark 1:14-15
What is God Saying to You?
Sunday July 16th, 2017

I was thinking recently about the two questions I often ask at the end of my messages and realized I probably needed some deeper explanation of them. These two questions are absolutely Biblical and deeply tied to the concepts of **repentance, faith and new life**.

Now I realize we all learn differently, some learn by seeing, some by hearing (which most preaching is) and some learn by doing. Well on the sermon notes page of our bulletin there is a visual representation of the concepts I am talking about for our visual learners.



This circle can be called a circle of **“Continual Renewal”**. It can also be called a **“circle of repentance”**, and what I am using it for is to explain repentance and belief and how they are tied to the two questions: **What is God saying to you? And What are you going to do about it?**

Note that on the side of the circle that says **“Repent”** is the question **“What is God saying to you?”** On the left side of the circle, which says **“Believe”** is the question **“What are you going to do?”** To **“repent”** is to listen to what God is saying and to **“believe”** is to respond to the message. Now these are not two independent experiences, but one leads into the other after we hear from God. We enter this circle of repentance once we hear from God.

Now most of us, I believe, have experienced what I would call classical evangelical preaching where repentance and conversion are equivalent words. I remember going to a Billy Graham revival as a youth and after a powerful sermon people were called to come forward to the altar in deep remorse, shame and guilt over sins committed. They were called to repent, to turn from their sin and turn towards God.



This people did in droves. The point is that repentance and conversion were deeply emotional states full of guilt and shame followed by forgiveness, peace and new life.

At the age of 20 I had a deeply emotional conversion experience. For about 2 years of my life I lived the life of the Prodigal Son with lots of drinking partying and more. I sobered up one morning and in deep shame spoke with my older brother, and he said what I needed to do was to truly turn my life over to Jesus and quit sinning. This I did in a deeply emotional way. I remember weeping as I turned my life over to Christ. It was a profound turning to God.

From my Billy Graham experiences and my own personal experience I saw **“Repentance”** as something that only occurred once for personal conversion and if you had other experiences of **“Repentance”** they would happen only if you backslid into sin.

I saw repentance as a deeply emotional experience and you had to recreate that deep emotion if you wanted to experience repentance again. You had to feel terrible about yourself to repent. I have experienced this in people I have met who would tell me, "I don't feel like I've been to church unless I go home feeling terribly guilty." To me, that's a hard and miserable approach to faith, and doesn't have much of the Joy of the Lord.



I did not understand that the word "repent" means simple "to change one's mind" and turn to God. When you turn to God you naturally turn from sin. When you hear from God (the repent part), and respond to His word (the believe part) you draw nearer to God and begin to look more like Jesus. Those who strive to look like Jesus are disciples of Jesus, which is our mission as a church, and more on that next week.

Two experiences when I was a youth pastor sent me on a lifelong quest to understand repentance and new life and explain it to others. So far this circle of "Continuous Renewal" or "Repentance Circle" has given me the best tool yet to do this. Well these two experiences were, first of all, a youth at a church that often brought in recovering drug addicts and ex-gang members to witness to the youth about their conversion and new life said, "I guess you have to become a drug addict or a criminal before you can become a Christian."

The second experience was my friend Cheryl who one day I was talking with about conversion to Christ. Now Cheryl was and is one of the most deeply committed, spiritual Christians that I know. She said, "I can't remember a time in my life when I haven't been close to God." She grew up knowing and loving Jesus her entire life and never drifted into any major sin. She, to the best of her knowledge, had always been committed to Christ. And she strove every day to live a godly life, a life like Jesus. In that she strives to turn to God daily she repents daily. She walks through this circle.

You see some have to touch the stove to be convinced that it's hot, (the prodigal sons) others simply have to be told (the older brother).

Now let's look more closely at this circle using our Mark scripture. One way to think of this circle is like an expanded time lapse photo of what can happen in an instance, or over a great stretch of time when someone repents and finds new life.

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

In Greek there are two words that are translated into English as "time". There is the word "Chronos" which means chronological time, and there is the word Kairos for time. This is the time in which God breaks into our world and our lives with a word. In the phrase "The time has come," the Greek word Kairos is used. Jesus was saying God has broken into our world, "The Kingdom of God is near." Kairos moments often happen for us in our best times in life and in our worst.

For Jesus his Kairos moment was his cousin John being thrown into prison. This was God's word to Jesus to begin his ministry.

Over the years in small groups, when I have explained a Kairos experience to people, many have spoken to me of the death of a child or loved one. They spoke to me about how God spoke to them and broke into their lives at that worst of moments to give them hope and comfort and faith.

God is always speaking. God is always trying to break into our lives to bring us guidance, comfort, hope and love. We can train our hearts and minds to hear God in the good, the bad and the very normal times and turn to Him which means repent.

God speaks to us in many ways. Sometimes it is in the **circumstances of life**. Sometimes it is through the **scriptures, prayer, worship, hymns and music**. Sometimes it is through **nature**. Sometimes it is through **fellowship or service**, and sometimes literally through **signs**.

When my wife, son, and I moved to Tucson 12 years ago we were very, very sad to leave a church we had been a part of for 21 years. Our children were born and raised there. My wife had all her friends there; so to say that we were a bit depressed was an understatement. We went into family counseling twice. But one day my wife was following a truck on her 40 minute drive to work and on the back of the truck it said, **"Smile, be happy you're in Tucson."** For her it was a Kairos moment a moment in which God spoke to her heart that largely lifted the sadness.

Note that Jesus said, **"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"** Note the order of Repent and believe. We repent first and then we believe. **We hear from God and then we respond.** Let's break this down.

The first thing we do as we enter the circle of continuous renewal is to **"Observe."** **We observe that God has spoken.** We hear God speak and know it is God speaking. We, as we go through life, learn to **"Open the eyes of our hearts" to hear God speaking.** We live life looking for God to speak and be present in all we do. It is as some spiritual directors call it, "Practicing the presence of God."

Next we **"Reflect"**. This is an internal discussion as to what does it all mean. We see this in the Bible when Mary **"...treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."** After the shepherds came and worshipped Jesus and told her about what the angels had said.

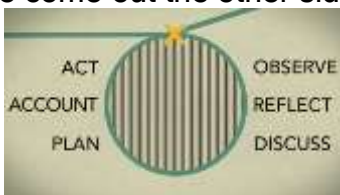
Now the word of God can at times be mysterious and a bit inscrutable like a burning bush, or shepherds coming in from the field, or a sign on a truck; so it's good to **"Discuss"** what we've heard with others to make sure it is the voice of God, and not our own desires, or the voice of other spirits, so we discuss. In my deep conversion experience I spoke with my brother. Many who respond to alter calls have counselors waiting for them. We have Stephen ministers after every service.

There is no end to those we could talk to, but God has placed some in our lives who can give better direction: Christian friends, Sunday School classes, pastors, believing relatives, prayer groups, accountability groups, huddle groups specifically designed to help people listen to God and respond.

Sometimes we go all the way around the circle and skip some of the steps like when we see someone in immediate need, we often immediately respond. We go from hearing God cry

out in our neighbor to immediately responding. But often when we hear from God, especially in difficult circumstances it takes us awhile to respond. And this circle gives us well reasoned steps to do that.

Now every time we go around the circle when we hear from God, and my assertion is that God is constantly speaking, we are drawn closer to God and look more like Jesus. God doesn't just whip us around the circle and we come out the other side exactly like we've entered it.



Even though in the bulletin the drawing it is a straight line, it actually should point upward for we are turning more to God.



No, to go through this experience it is more like a slinky drawing us closer and closer to God, more and more like Jesus. We become better disciples because disciples look each and every day more like Jesus, and are closer to God. Sometimes when I explain this I tell people we are learning how to live a slinky lifestyle.

And here is how it looks on a ministry level. Karen Tryon came to me with an idea she had gotten to do a prayer shawl ministry. That idea was her **Kairos** moment, she had **reflected** on it for a long time; she came to me to **discuss** it. I affirmed it was God speaking, she made some **plans** (that is part of the believe side I will address in two weeks) she recruited some people to help her (that is the **accountability** part) and then she **acted**. Hundreds of these shawls have been created, blessed and distributed to those in spiritual need.

Repentance, turning to God, is not only for dealing with sin is it for gathering new life and service for God.

So whenever I ask the question "What is God saying to you?" **it is an invitation to hear God** and turn to God as God has spoken to you in the scripture read, preached and sung and in the fellowship and service experienced here.

We believe when we respond. When I ask the question "**What are you going to do?**" that is **a challenge** to believe, to act on what God has said. This I will address in two weeks. Next week I will address the "Why". Why enter a lifestyle, not just a single conversion experience, but a lifestyle, a slinky lifestyle of continual renewal of "repentance and belief" as Jesus said in our Mark Scripture.

I believe in the end it is how we discover God's purpose for us and our lives. Now I know this is a very systematic (as in systematic theology) approach to repentance and belief, but I believe it is a very helpful way for keeping us focused on God and becoming more and more like Jesus! Now I know for some who have heard this message its' probably too much of an intellectual approach to the faith, but I believe for others it has been profoundly enlightening.

The invitation is "What is God Saying to you?"

The challenge is "And what are you going to do?" Amen!