

Misconceptions of Mission Ministry

Matthew 4:12-25 ¹² Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, ¹⁴ that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: ¹⁵ "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, *By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles:* ¹⁶ The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned." ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." ¹⁸ And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ They immediately left *their* nets and followed Him. ²¹ Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets. He called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him. ²³ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. ²⁴ Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. ²⁵ Great multitudes followed Him-- from Galilee, and *from* Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

What does Jesus mean when He says "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand?" He simply means that the Kingdom of Heaven is not a long way off. It is

not a difficult thing to get to or to find. It is near at hand that is it is near to you. As Jesus explains with the first word, "repent." All who repent and turn to Jesus will find the kingdom. Jesus is ready to rule in you heart. You don't have to climb a mountain with a blue flower or perform super works of saint hood. His kingdom is easily accessible to all.

This is the message Jesus came to bring. This is the mission and the work which was the goal and focus of His ministry. He preached the gospel. Repent the kingdom is easily available to all.

Last week Jesus we heard about Jesus' baptism. His baptism was a powerful event which connects us to Him and assures us of the forgiveness of our sins. It was also His anointing, the beginning of His ministry. After His baptism He went into the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days. That is something we will talk about the first Sunday in Lent. When He returned from the wilderness He began His work. That work was the preaching of the Gospel.

He preached the Gospel. He called four disciples so that they might preach the same gospel. He healed and cleansed and cast out demons in order to show that He had the authority to forgive sins and preach the gospel. Everything He did was focused on this goal of preaching the simple gospel.

He calls us to preach the same simple gospel. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. The gospel is a simple thing. Witnessing is a simple thing. Yet somehow we have tendency to make it complicated.

Our sermon theme this morning is Misconceptions of Mission Ministry. Perhaps I got carried away with the alliteration but the point is simple: false ideas that keep us from effective witnessing.

We forget what the goal is.

Often when we are confronted with unbelievers, we get distracted and forget what our goal is.

Sometimes we think our goal is to prove that abortion, homosexuality or similar sinful lifestyles are wrong. Those things are wrong. They are sinful. But that is not our goal. They are sins. Sins not unlike all the sins that we do. Those who do such sins need to recognize them as sins and repent of them, just as we need to repent of other sins. But it is our goal is not to prove that we are right.

Sometimes we think our goal is to prove that the political party we support is the right and only political party. Sometimes we think our goal is to prove that creation is true and evolution wrong.

We may need to address these issues but none of these things are our goal. The goal is to call people to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Jesus never takes his eyes off the goal. He is there to preach repentance and salvation through Himself. When they bring the adulterous woman to him, he doesn't get sidetracked with questions of whether she should be stoned. He calls everyone present to repent. When He is confronted by the Samaritan women at the well He doesn't get into a debate about her many husbands. He calls her to repent and receive the forgiveness that He has to offer.

He calls sins sin to be sure, but He focuses not on debates about the sin but on the need for repentance and forgiveness through Him.

We need to stand up and honestly confess the truth of scripture. We don't back down from calling sin sin. But we also need to keep our eyes on the goal. The goal is the preaching of repentance and forgiveness through Jesus.

It's all about me.

We have a tendency to make witnessing all about me, my abilities or more often my lack of abilities.

When Jesus called the disciples, they left everything to follow Him. It's not about who they were or what they had. They left everything behind. Their all about who Christ is and what He has to offer.

They left everything to follow Christ. That is a statement about the power of Christ's calling. It is also an indication that nothing they had or owned was of any use in their new life of following Jesus. The calling was not of them. The work was not of them. They left all behind. There was nothing they could bring to the table. They came to Christ to receive from Him all that they would need.

Throughout His ministry Jesus promises that He would give them what they needed.

Jesus tells the disciples, "**Ask, and it will be given to you**" Matthew 7:7.

He would give them understanding. He would give them the words to speak. He would give them direction. He would fill them with the Holy Spirit.

We tend to make it all about me, my abilities, my charm, my intelligence, my tactfulness. There is a place for tactfulness in witnessing about Christ. One wouldn't get very far sitting outside a window yelling fornicator into the night. But it is not the tactfulness of this world.

Because we make it all about me. We are often hesitant, afraid, and timid. We feel unfit and unworthy to be partakers in the work of the kingdom. Because of course by ourselves we are unfit. But it isn't about us. It is about Christ and what He has promised to do through us. It is about His word and the power of that word.

When Christ calls us, we leave everything behind. That is part of that repentance that Jesus was talking about. Leaving all that I think I am behind and coming to Christ for Him to fill us.

Remember in the parable of the talents. He gave the talents to the servants, to one five and to one two and to another one. None of them brought anything to the Lord.

Jesus promises in the gospel of John:

John 14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

There is only one thing that we need the one thing we need is Jesus' word. It's not about me. It's about Jesus.

Let the professionals handle it.

Sometimes we have the habit of thinking well, that's that pastor's job, let him do it.

Jesus doesn't go to the professionals. He doesn't call the pharisees or the Sadducees. He calls four fishermen.

Some of the greatest missionaries we find in scriptures are not the "professionals." There was a little girl who knew that there was a prophet in Israel who could heal Namaan. There was a demon possessed man, who wanted to follow Jesus but was left behind. When Jesus returned he found a group of disciples in that area. There was a blind who could not read and knew nothing about God's word but knew one thing. He knew what Jesus had done for him.

It's true that there is a time and place to say. "I don't know let's go ask the pastor."

After all that is part of what your pastor is there for.

But the true witness is not answering all questions. Even the pastor can't do that. The true witness is the simple confession of what Jesus has done for you. Like that blind man there is much you don't know. There is much that I don't know. But there is one thing that you do know.

You are a sinner. Jesus died for you. Everyone who repents and trusts in Him will go to heaven.

And that one simple thing that you do know is the same one simple thing that Jesus was preaching everywhere He went.

1 Timothy 1:15 This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

This is the one thing that we need. This is the one simple message. This is the one thing that we know, even if we know nothing else.

This is the light that shined among the gentiles in our Old Testament reading. This is the light that we have and can share with others.

Jesus is the light of the world. Witnessing is not that difficult it consists solely in showing people that light. It consists of sharing the simple message "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Amen