

Welcome to everyone listening outside.

**When did you first believe?** Did it happen all at once? Like an epiphany from heaven, did the lightbulb go off and everything fall into place, and you knew that Jesus was God and you surrendered your life to Him? You know the date it happened. You know exactly when and where you placed your faith in Jesus.

Or did you have to scratch and claw for every inch of your faith. Every question and every doubt was a battle. You tried to refuse to believe, but God never gave up on you. He kept placing providential moments in your path, the right person, the right circumstance. God pursued you long before you pursued Him. To borrow the words of C.S. Lewis describing his own birth of faith, you were “dragged kicking and screaming into the kingdom of God, eyes darting left and right for some means of escape.”

Maybe you inherited your faith? You were born with a heritage of faith. Your mom, your dad, your grandparents, your great grandparents. The torch of faith has been passed from generation to generation. You can’t remember a time when you didn’t believe. However, like genetic traits you can inherit from your parents, athletic ability or a beautiful singing voice, inherited faith must be exercised and used to be of any use. Your parents cannot believe for you. Faith has always been a part of your life, but as you grew up, through various tests and trials, the faith became your own. Not your dad’s faith. Not your grandma’s faith, but your faith. You believe because you believe.

**So, what is faith? What is it that makes faith faith?** When does it cross that line from an idea, from a maybe, to genuine faith, real trust, true hope— a saving faith.

We find part of the answer, at least, in Mark 1. Mark is the gospel for those who like things short and sweet. If in college, you read the Cliffsnotes instead of the book; if, like Sergeant Joe Friday, you just want the facts, then Mark is the gospel for you. He is short and to the point. He covers the highlights and skips the long-winded sermons and the exhaustive explanations. His gospel is only 16 chapters compared to 28 in Matthew, 24 for Luke, and 21 in John.

Just in Mark 1 we see that he skips the birth of Jesus entirely, not really necessary to his main theme. His introduction is only 1 verse. He covers the ministry of John the Baptist in seven verses, the baptism of Jesus in 3 verses, His temptation in the wilderness in 2 verses, the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in two verses, and the calling of his first disciples in 4 verses.

It’s right in those two verses where Mark talks about how Jesus began his ministry that we find this week’s core verse. Vs. 14 gives us the timeline, “*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God.*” No fluff. No fanfare, just this simple statement of fact that Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God.

Now, we learned last Sunday that Gospel means what? Good news. You see the good news cannot be stopped. You can arrest John and put him in prison, but someone even greater steps up to proclaim the good news of God. What is that good news? Well, Mark sums it up in verse 15 with this quote from Jesus, and this is our Core Verse today and it's all about faith,

***"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* – Mark 1:15**

Now, Matthew probably would have given us the whole sermon here, but Mark just gives us the first line of Jesus' conclusion. And what we have here is a Cliffsnotes explanation of faith. So, let's unpack this a bit.

### **The Time is Right**

The first thing we see is that the time is right. There are two things in our Core Verse that tell us this. First, Jesus says *"The time is fulfilled."* Later, the Apostle Paul in talking about Jesus, called it *"the fullness about time."* This is like when you go to some big event, and the lights go out, the spotlight comes on, and you hear a loud voice, "Ladies and gentlemen, the moment you've been waiting for." You saw the event scheduled, you bought the tickets, you marked it on your calendar. You put it all over your social media, you bought the shirt, you took the day off, and now, there you are, the big moment has arrived, the breathless anticipation is over. This is it.

That's what Jesus means here when he says the time is fulfilled. Everything God has been doing from the beginning of time has led to this point. You've waited for generations. Prophets spoke of it; the Scriptures tell of it. You've heard the stories since you were a little boy or a little girl. For your great grandparents, it was only a distant vision, but now is the time is right. This is the moment.

The second clue that the time is right are these two words, *"at hand,"* as in *"the kingdom of God is at hand."* Some Bible versions say *the kingdom is near*. This isn't nearness in time, as though the kingdom starts in 5 minutes. It is near in time, but this is nearness in terms of location. It's right here with you. The kingdom isn't some other time in some other place. It's right here, right now. Jesus is saying, I am the kingdom and here I am.

Have you ever been looking for someone? You're walking all over the house, going from room to room. Where could they be? They've got to be here somewhere. And they sneak up right behind you and goose you. They say, "I'm right here." You scream and it takes about 5 years off your life. That's what Jesus is saying, "I'm right here. I'm the kingdom and here I am."

In Luke 17, some of the religious leaders are just grilling Jesus. Jesus has been teaching about the kingdom of God, and so they are pestering him with questions, "When is it coming?" "Where is it coming?" And here's what Jesus tells them, *"The kingdom of God is not coming in ways that can be observed, nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you."* The kingdom is already among you and you don't even recognize me.

Think about this. Jesus isn't just proclaiming the gospel. He is the gospel. He doesn't just tell them about the good news. He is the good news. Jesus came at just the right and in just the right place to be the good news we so desperately need. Faith begins and ends with Jesus. It's all about Jesus.

## The Significance of the Kingdom

The time is right for what? The kingdom. This's another one of those churchy, Christianese words we talked about last Sunday. What is the kingdom? That's a big question with an even bigger answer. Whole books have been written on the subject. Let me give you the short answer, the Sargent Joe Friday, Gospel of Mark, short and sweet version. A kingdom requires a king, and a king is someone who rules.

The kingdom of God is the rule of God. The kingdom happens when God gets His way.

By rights, as the Creator, God rules the entire universe. But when Jesus shows up on the scene announcing the kingdom of God is at hand, the kingdom is near, He's talking about something much more personal than God rules everything. He's talking about our relationship to the rule of God. The one thing that God doesn't rule by default is your life, my life, and the lives of everyone else.

You see, God in his desire for a true relationship built on love, created us with free will. You are free to love God with all your heart, and you are also free not to love Him. If you weren't free to not love Him, then your love for Him wouldn't mean a whole lot. You experience the kingdom when God rules your life, when God has His way with you. That's how you know you are in the kingdom. God has His way with you.

There is an old hymn that has seen a resurgence in popularity in recent years that captures this idea of God's rule in your life.

All to Jesus I surrender,  
All to him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust him,  
In his presence daily live.

Refrain:  
I surrender all,  
I surrender all,  
All to thee, my blessed Savior,  
I surrender all.

Bottom line is this— Jesus won't take your heart by force. You have to give it to Him. He won't make you believe in Him. He won't twist your arm until you cry uncle. He will pursue you. He will love you. He will chase you. He will woo you. He will call you, He will place all sorts of providential people and events in your path, but He won't make you.

## Our Response to the Kingdom

The kingdom of God is the rule of God, but for God to rule your life and for you to be a part of His kingdom, you must respond to him. This is what faith is all about. Mark doesn't use the word *faith* here, but what he gives us is a very simple explanation of faith. In fact, the Greek word for belief and for faith are based on the same word. What is our response?

In our Core Verse, Jesus says we must respond in two ways. We are to repent and we are to believe. Repentance and belief are mentioned throughout the Bible, sometimes together, sometimes with other things. Acts 2:38 says, "*Repent and be baptized.*" Romans 10:9 says, "*If you confess with your mouth that*

*Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart (mind, will, and emotions) that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*

You will find these same things mentioned in the Bible again and again when it comes to what we are supposed to do to be a part of the kingdom. Sometimes they're packaged a little differently or one step or another is assumed. It's kind of like Mexican food. It doesn't matter what you order, it's the same 5 ingredients, just mixed a little differently.

When Jesus says repent and believe, this isn't multiple choice, pick one or the other. The "and" here combines them in a way that is inseparable. Help me out here.

- Salt and....pepper
- Socks and....shoes
- Bread and....butter
- Peanut butter and....jelly
- Needle and....thread
- Repent and...believe

Repenting and believing go hand. If you really repent, you will believe. And if you really believe, you have no choice but to repent. They are two sides of the same coin. One side of the coin says "Turn from," and the other side of the coin says "Turn to."

### **Turn From**

Repent is the "turn from" side of the coin. This word means a change of direction. It is a change of thinking that leads to a change of living. Let me give you the Gospel of Mark, short and sweet definition of Repentance- "turn around."

You're going this way. You realize you're going the wrong way. You stop. You turn around. You start walking in the other direction. That's repentance.

How many of you saw the movie *The Blind Side*. Sandra Bullock won best actress for her portrayal of Leigh Ann Tuohy in the movie. *The Blind Side* tells the true story of a Christian family who took in a homeless boy named Michael Oher and gave not just a roof over his head, but a home, hope, family, and a purpose. In 2009, he was a first round draft pick for the Baltimore Ravens.

At a recent fundraiser, Michael's adoptive father, Sean Tuohy, said that the transformation started with two words that changed their worlds. They spotted Michael walking down the road one early, frigid November morning. They drove by him, when his wife Leigh Ann said, "Turn Around."

They didn't just have feelings for him. They didn't just feel bad for him. They didn't just think about it or talk about it. They turned around. They changed direction, and that changed everything. That's repentance. Turn around.

Stop doing what you're doing. Stop going where you're going. Stop digging yourself deeper into a hole. Turn around.

One day you realize, "Hey, I'm out of shape. I way overweight. I don't exercise like I should. I don't eat right. Something has to change." Now a lot of us know this, but it doesn't change anything, right. We still

sit on the couch and do nothing. We still eat lots of junk food, we don't eat healthy vegetables. We know the right thing, but don't do the right thing. That's not repentance. That's not faith. It's lifeless knowledge.

Repentance happens when our thinking about something changes enough that we actually act on it, and we change directions, we turn from something. When you repent, you turn around and go the other direction.

Here's another thing about repentance. It doesn't always happen all at once. Some people quit smoking all at once. Others battle for months or years to kick the habit. Some sins we quit cold turkey, but other sinful habits take a long time. It doesn't mean you're a failure, if you mess up. It doesn't mean that your faith isn't real. It just means repentance is still happening.

Go back to my illustration of walking and realizing that you're going the wrong way. You can just stop, turn around and go the other way. Some sins are like that. Just stop and turn around.

But if I'm out riding my bike. Say, I'm on a big 50 mile ride, and I'm following this route, and my GPS messes up. I miss my turn and I realize, "Hey, I'm going the wrong way. I can't stop on a dime and turn around. I have to slow down, and when I turn I use up the whole road, otherwise I'll wipe out. Some sins are like that.

Now say we're in a car and we realize we've missed our turn. Now, it takes even longer to slow down. We have to pull into a parking lot or do a three point turn, before we can turn around. There are some stubborn sins that are like that.

Know this- repentance is an ongoing process, not a one-time moment. Jesus says this in a specific way in the Greek that shows this is a continuing action on our parts. When we want to surrender to the rule of God in our lives we repent, we turn from sin, and we keep on turning. Some things we turn from quickly, other things may take years or decades, but we never stop turning.

### **Turn To**

So, the first side of the faith coin is repent— turn from our sin. The other side is to turn to, to believe, to believe in Jesus. We turn from sin, so that we can turn to Jesus and follow him. Jesus says here we are to "*believe in the gospel.*" That's what we talked about last week. The gospel is the good news of Jesus- that Jesus came to die for every wrong thing you will ever do, say, or think.

Just like repent, the command to believe is an ongoing command. We keep believing. To quote the famous theologian Steve Perry, "Don't Stop Believing." We keep turning to Jesus again and again.

We need to clear up one issue here. Lots of people say they believe in God or they believe in Jesus, they believe in the Bible. And what they mean by this is that they believe that God exists, that He's real. There really was a person named Jesus who lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago. He really died on the cross, that the Bible is the word of God. Then they come to a verse like this and say, "Well, I believe, so I must be saved."

The problem is we often use the word *believe* differently that the Bible does. What we mean is that we intellectually agree that something is true. We think in our minds that it's true. We may even admire this

truth. The problem is that you can agree that something is true, but that truth doesn't change your life. It doesn't capture your heart.

There are lots of things we *believe* are factually true, we intellectually agree, but we don't allow that *belief* to actually change our lives. We believe we need exercise, but we don't get off the couch. We believe we should eat healthy. "Yes. I'll have the double quarter pounder meal and supersize that, please." We believe we should exercise our right to vote, but half of us won't do it. Maybe you believe it is a wise and healthy choice to wear a mask when you go to a public place, but so often we don't do it.

That's how many people believe in Jesus, and that's not what Jesus means when he says, believe. That kind of belief can't save you. There's a little letter toward the end of the NT called James. It was actually written by Jesus' half-brother. He grew up as Jesus' kid brother, and at first, he didn't believe. But after Jesus' death and resurrection he had faith. He says that faith that doesn't change what you do is useless. Listen to this, "*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe— and shudder!*" Mental agreement isn't enough. Even Satan and demons have that kind of belief, but it doesn't save them.

The belief that Jesus is talking about here means to believe in something enough to trust it. **That is faith to believe in something enough to trust it.** I believe this chair is strong enough to hold me. It looks strong. It feels sturdy, but until I actually sit in it, it is not real belief. It is not saving faith. True faith is to believe in Jesus enough to put your life in his hands.

I started this message by asking this question, "When did you first believe." Perhaps you're not there yet. You can see some of the foundation laid. Maybe you believe in God. You believe there has to be a greater point to life. Some of the pieces are there. They're taking shape, but that crucial missing piece isn't in place yet.

But that maybe that moment is right now. Today is the day that your belief crosses the line to faith. Today is the day you turn from and turn to. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:2, "*Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*"

**Do you believe in Him enough to trust Him?** What is it you need to turn from this morning? What's keeping you from turning completely to Jesus? Do you believe in Him enough to trust Him?