

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Jesus & New Beginnings

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Series: Unknown
Mark 1:1-34

**BIG IDEA – JESUS CAME SO YOU CAN HAVE A NEW BEGINNING
AND A NECESSARY ENDING**

It's interesting. You see that video, and it ends with a question...*Who is Jesus?* You can type or turn to Mark, chapter 1, because we are going to spend the next 20 weeks... You go, "How long is that?" Half as long as a woman is pregnant. That's how long that is. We're going to be in this book for a long time.

Let me tell you something, guys. Here's what that video tells us. It tells us the condition spiritually of our city. I know we live in Winston-Salem, and I know we're in the Bible Belt (that's what it was historically called), but the truth is cities like Winston, or anywhere in the Southeast, are often overchurched and underreached. What you saw in that video is a representation of our city.

You have a lot of different answers about Jesus. You have the one answer. It's ignorance and arrogance. It's like, "I don't know, and I don't care." It's like, "Well, then I don't know what to do with you. I'll pray for you." The other answers were super spiritual. "He's the Lord and Savior. Right?" The guy nods. Or "Jesus is my baby." I'm like, "Maybe? What do you mean by that?" Or "Jesus changed my life."

What's interesting also... Look. We came with cameras. We didn't tell them we were from a church unless they asked. We just said, "Can we ask you an important question?" and then we asked that question. I know it's intimidating in 2022. "What are you going to do with the video?" But did you notice how many people were afraid to say anything? I think we're afraid to say anything about Jesus because we know how important he is. We know how monumental of a question that is.

So, here's what I want you to do. I want you to grab the little bookmark we gave you when you came in. If you were here a year ago, we gave you these about a year ago. I just want to take one minute really quickly and talk about this. Here's the thing. We want to be a conversion community.

What is a conversion community? A *conversion community* is a place where life change happens. It's where destinies and legacies and eternities are changed. It's where sin is repented of. It's where marriages are restored. It's where forgiveness is offered. It's where lives are changed.

Here's the tool we're giving you. We're not about rules; we're about tools. Let me just give you one minute on this. What this bookmark is supposed to do is help you with the two areas that Christians... I know not everyone in here is a Christian, but if you're in here and you're a Christian, you go, "I want to share my faith more." Well, why don't we? Normally because we're not thinking of *who*, and we're not thinking of how to do it.

You'll be hearing more about these *FRANC* and *BLESS* lists in the future. *FRANC* basically tells you who...*friends, relatives, acquaintances, neighbors, coworkers* and *classmates*. *BLESS* tells you how...*begin with prayer, listen, eat, serve, share*. Our hope is that every person who calls Two Cities Church home would take personal responsibility for the Great Commission where they live, learn, work, and play.

So, I'm going to pray for us, and then we're going to look at the gospel of Mark, and we're going to see that question answered...*Who is Jesus?* We're going to begin today. We're going to be here all the way until Christmas Eve. Let's pray together.

Lord, we see a video like that, and if we're thinking rightly, Lord, we're heartbroken. We think of young men, young ladies, and older people. We think of the intersection of our whole city, and that question... It's heartbreaking that most people don't know. Lord, we realize, and we own it, that we live in the greatest decline of Christianity in the history of our nation. We live in the most biblically illiterate America. Lord, we would like to be part of the solution.

We know that happens as we each take personal responsibility to tell other people about Jesus, whether they're in our network or in our neighborhood. So, would you give us the heart? Would you use this series, as we see how awesome Jesus is, and his commitment to invite other people to follow him and to have a life with God? Would you use this series in our church, in our Community Groups, in our families, and in our individual lives? We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Okay. You can type or turn to Mark 1. I'll meet you there in a moment. We're in a 20-week series on the gospel of Mark. Literally, this is what we're doing for the rest of 2022, and then we're going to have big Christmas Eve services, and then we're going to start over in a new book and a new series in January.

Here's what this means. If we get to the end of this series and you have not done your Christmas shopping, you need to do it. So, when we get to chapter 14... Make a note in your Bible, chapter 14 of Mark, "Start Christmas shopping." We're going to be in here for a long time.

Let me introduce... I always do this the first of the series. I have to introduce the whole book, so let me just do that for a second. There are four gospels. There's Matthew, there's Mark, there's Luke, and there's John. Why? Because the Bible talks about things being confirmed by many witnesses. So, we have four different witnesses to the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus was too great and glorious to have taken just one snapshot or one picture. Think of them as almost four different documentaries. In fact, all of the Gospels in your Bible are called "The Gospel According to..." and then Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Why? Because there's one gospel, but there are many different perspectives, or views, of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Matthew (which I'm not going to preach through right now, but stay around long enough and we'll get to it) is the gospel for the Jews. When you read Matthew, you're like, "Oh, it's always talking about things being fulfilled. Oh, it's always quoting the Old Testament. Oh, all of Jesus' teachings say, 'You've heard *this*, but I say *that*.'" Why? Because he's writing to the religious people of the day.

How about Luke? Well, Luke is a great doctor. He's very detailed. Luke has really two passions: the teachings of Jesus... Almost all of the parables you love...the parable of the good Samaritan, the parable of the prodigal son... Guess what? They're only found in Luke. Luke had a real heart for Jesus' detailed teaching. He also had a real heart for the poor, the spiritually poor and the financially poor, so that comes out in the book of Luke. We'll get there eventually one day.

Then there's John, which we walked through a while ago at some level. The book of John is written to the intellectuals of that day. That's why you open it up, and it's looking into eternity past, and it's talking about the Greek word *logos*. I've told you this before, but when I was doing ministry at Duke for four years, I would always take students to the gospel of John, because it was a very intellectual environment, and they really enjoyed the conversations there.

So, we're in Mark. What is Mark? Mark is the gospel for the everyday man and everyday woman. It was written for the Roman soldiers. It was written for the Roman citizens. It's very action oriented. The word *immediately* shows up 42 times, I think. You'll see it today. In chapter 1 alone, it shows up 8 different times.

Jesus is very action oriented. He's a man on the move. He's a man for others. In fact, there's almost no teaching. We'll see some a little bit today. There's very little teaching of Jesus in the book of Mark. It's not so much what Jesus said, it's what he did. So, it's going to be an unbelievable gospel for us to walk through together.

Let me tell you a moment about who wrote it: a guy named John Mark. John Mark is a young man when Jesus goes to the cross, dies, and rises from the dead. In fact, at the end of Mark 14, there's this interesting passage where it says there's a young man. He's in the garden of Gethsemane, and his linen cloth is ripped away, and he runs away naked. You go, "That's the inspired Word of God? That's an interesting verse." Well, most people think that's Mark writing about himself. That's what church tradition tells us.

Mark was a young man. He ends up being a convert and a disciple of Peter. Peter, in 1 Peter 5, calls Mark his spiritual son. So, church tradition, church history, tells us Mark is this young guy who comes to Christ under Peter. In fact, Mark's mom is a Christian. We think Mark probably grew up in a wealthy family, because Mark's mom is hosting this fairly big church service in her home in Acts, chapter 12.

Anyway, Mark learns the gospel from Peter and writes it down. So, what we're going to do now is we're going to spend 20 weeks... There are 16 chapters. Let me just take a moment for those of you who will find this interesting, and some of you will. Why are series the length that they are? You could go, "Kyle, why are we spending 20 weeks?"

Part of me would love to spend three years in the book of Mark. I love the Bible. We could do that. That would, in some ways, be easy for me. We would just take one paragraph, and I would take you deep into it, and we would be in the gospel of Mark for four years. You'd be like, "All right. That was my whole medical school, the gospel of Mark. That was my whole college experience, the gospel of Mark."

That's not a bad thing. Churches do that. I'm not here to beat up on other churches. Here's what we believe. We believe it takes the whole Bible to make the whole Christian. We also try to know our church. In most churches in America, the average person is in your church for three to five years. I know you think you're going to be here longer, and hopefully you will, and many of you have been.

But when we look back over the last three to five years, many people have left. They moved to different cities. They got pregnant and wanted to be closer to Mom and Dad. Their parents got old, and they needed to take care of them. They had a new job opportunity, and they went there. They got a chance to go to residency in some other state. So, we understand we have people for three to five years.

What we're trying to do is hit all different parts and portions of the Scripture in a year period and a three- to five-year period. So, think about this year, guys. If you've been with us, we've been in Hebrew poetry for eight weeks. Remember that? That was Song of Solomon. We were in the book of James. That was New Testament epistle. We were looking at the life of David. That was Old Testament narrative. Now we're in a gospel, New Testament narrative.

Why do I tell you this? I tell you this because we're going to have to move fairly quickly. It's almost like we're all getting in a plane together, and we're going to fly over the gospel of Mark. I'm going to slow down at certain points and say, "Look at this. Look at this. Look at this." But there are certain parts we're going to have to simplify.

There are certain parts we're going to have to summarize. There are certain parts of the gospel that are kind of repetitive, and we may summarize those parts as we move on. It's going to be an incredible series, and the hope is at the end you are able to answer that question, "Who is Jesus?" in a clear and profound way.

So, with that said, turn with me to Mark, chapter 1, verse 1. Here's what it says: "***The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.***" Wow! What a way to start. He starts with the word *beginning*. If you know your Bible at all, can you think of anywhere else where the word *beginning* starts? You might go, "John's gospel." Yeah, but that was actually written after Mark's gospel.

So, where is the word *beginning* used? Well, you think about the creation story. Right? What Mark is doing by saying, "The beginning of the gospel of God" is he's pointing us all the way back to Genesis. Here's why. There are some big things to understand today.

Jesus Christ coming into the world is as significant as God creating the world. That's what he's trying to say. Creation is the greatest miracle God has ever done. It would be creation and the resurrection, the two greatest miracles. Creation: God speaks everything into being out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. God creates physical life. Jesus is going to come and create spiritual life.

Now here's what we see. *Beginning*. There are many beginnings in Scripture. I told you, there's John 1, there's Mark 1, and there's Genesis 1. Here's the whole idea: God is the one who initiates. God is the one who starts things. God is the one who begins things. This is a uniquely Christian perspective.

I'm going to tell you this until you're tired of me saying it. Christianity is different than every other religion, because every other religion says, "You have to start it. You have to start your relationship with God. You have to begin your relationship with God. You have to come up with the ideas. You have to make your way to heaven. You have to pursue God." Christianity is the only religion that says, "Actually, God begins things." Think about it *this* way. There are three things God initiates in.

God initiates in *creation*, which is really an amazing thing. We don't fully understand it. We have Genesis 1 and 2. What God does is God creates the world. No one asked him to create it. Then he decides out of abundance to share it with us. It's really amazing. This is why y'all love to travel. You love to see the world. You love to enjoy food. Creation is an amazing thing that God initiated. You didn't ask to be created. All of a sudden, there you were. God created you. So, God initiates in creation.

God initiates in *revelation*. You wouldn't know who God was unless he told us. God forfeits his personal privacy. Kind of the foundational statement about Christianity is we serve and worship the God who is and the God who speaks. Those are the foundational realities and truths about God. This is why it's so important for God to initiate in revelation. It's always more dependent on the person being known to open up and tell you about them than the person trying to know that person.

Let me give you an example. Every guy has had that time, maybe in middle school, high school, or college, where he's trying to get to know some girl, and she does not want to be known by him. If a lady does not want to be known by the guy, there's no question he can ask, no text he can send, no conversation he's going to start that he's going to get there.

So, God initiates in creation, God initiates in revelation, and today we see God initiating in *salvation*. It says, "***The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.***" What a title. *Jesus Christ* (that means anointed Messiah), *Son of God* (the only beloved, begotten Son of God).

Here's what's interesting. We're going back to the basics. In this series, we're going to return to the foundational principles of Christianity, which we all need to rediscover regularly. The first principle is we have to understand the gospel. The gospel is good news. That's literally what the word means. *Gospel* means good news.

We live in a society now where no one trusts the news. I don't mean that in any political way. It's probably true on both sides. There was a time... I don't know how long ago it was. You know, you have your three or four stations, and everyone is biased. Someone reads the *New York Times*, and someone else reads the *Wall Street Journal*. Whatever. Someone watches Fox. Someone watches CNN.

The whole point is there was a time when people trusted the news. We live in a time where people don't trust the news. Well, what is news? News is supposed to be communication about events that really happened that have an impact on us. That's the definition of *news*. By the way, this is a reminder that Christianity is not based on happenstance or fable or myth or fairy tale, but it's based on history.

Well, here's what we're told. We're told that the gospel is good news. Now here's the truth. We live in a world of bad news. I'm tired of talking about COVID, but let's just say for two years... "Fifteen days to slow the spread." We're in, like, day 900 right now. It was for six months, at least, or a year, depending on where you live. If you go to Whole Foods, they still think we're in the pandemic.

Depending on where you live, there's bad news, there's bad news, there's bad news. Then you get *really* bad news. There's a school shooting. Then what's monkeypox? It's everywhere. It's just constantly bad news. Christianity comes with good news. Let me ask you a question at the beginning of the series: Do you see Christianity as good news? I hope you do.

We're talking about sharing your faith and how to help people who are far from God and close to us. Here's the truth: if you see Christianity as good news, you're going to want to share it. The truth is anytime good news happens to you you can't help but share it. You do it different ways. If you're more introverted, you tell a few of your close friends. Some of you just tell everybody on Facebook immediately.

You get married; you share it. You get engaged; you share it. You have a kid; you share it. You buy a home; you share it. You're going on a great vacation; you share it. You're celebrating a big anniversary; you share it. It's like, "This is good news, and I want to tell other people about it."

Now here's what it says. Look at verse 1. This is so important. When you read the Bible, you should always ask, "What doesn't it say?" It doesn't say, "The gospel *about*

Jesus Christ." It *is* about Jesus. It's about his life. It's about his death. It's about his teaching. It's about his resurrection. But do you see what it says? "The gospel of Jesus Christ." Before it's a preposition (meaning, a true statement) it's a person.

Think about it *this* way: the good news of Christianity is that we get God through Jesus Christ. There was a book years ago called *God Is the Gospel* written by a guy named John Piper. He makes an interesting observation that I want to camp out with you for a second. He says every good gift from the gospel, if we understand it, is actually just to get us to God.

So, let's take three of them. If we say *forgiveness of sins*... Forgiveness of sins is a great gift. Who doesn't want to be forgiven of their sins? I promise you every person you will ever meet would love to be forgiven of their sins. Why is forgiveness of sins good news? Oh, because it gets sin out of the way. Sin is no longer a boundary. Sin is no longer a barrier. Sin is no longer a hindrance to my relationship with God. Do you see how God is the gospel there?

How about when Christ returns, and all things are made new, and you get a brand-new body in heaven? The older you get and the more people you meet... It's like, "I would love a new body." Right? Everybody, once they get old, wants a new body. Why is getting a new body good? Oh, because you're going to need as much energy and as much vitality, and you're going to need all five of your senses completely heightened so you can enjoy God forever.

Or how about going to heaven? Everybody wants to go to heaven. They just don't want God to be there. Maybe some of *us* don't want God to be there. If you could have all of your pleasures in life sanctified, if you could be with all of your friends and family, and you get to live forever, but God is not there, are you okay with that? Heaven basically says I need eternal life because God is so glorious it's going to take me millions and millions and millions and millions of years to understand him fully.

So, this is a big statement. Mark comes on the scene, and he says, "I want you to understand the gospel. It's the good news. It's not even about Jesus. It *is* about Jesus, but more than that, it's to bring us *to* Jesus." Here's the big idea for this message today: *Jesus came so you can have a new beginning and a necessary ending.*

So, Jesus comes. It's the beginning of the gospel. Jesus came so you and I and our families could have new beginnings, but (we'll see this) to have a new beginning means you have to have a necessary ending. That's why Jesus is going to talk a lot about repentance.

We're going to see three things today. First, if you're going to have a new beginning, you need a *new foundation*. Secondly, if you're going to have a new beginning, you need a *new authority*. Thirdly, if you're going to have a new beginning, you need *new priorities*. Let's look at them together.

Verse 2: **"As it is written in Isaiah the prophet..."** He's going to say a couple of other things, but I'm going to stop there for a second. Basically, what he's saying is, "I want to tell you the good news of Jesus, and it was encapsulated in the Old Testament." Here's the whole thing. He's talking to Jewish people. He's talking to people who know their Old Testament. He's basically saying, "The entire 39 books of the Old Testament... All of it was pointing to and preparing us for Jesus."

This is, by the way, why I always recommend even adults (yes, even adults who have been a Christian for a long time) read *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. I know it's something you get kids when they're little or you get it at a baby shower when a baby is going to be born, but I'm telling you, *The Jesus Storybook Bible* shows you how every story of the Bible points to and prepares for Jesus or anticipates and announces Jesus.

Here's what he's saying. He's quoting the Old Testament. He's quoting Isaiah. He's going to quote a couple of other passages. He's going to basically say, "Guys, every longing we've had in the Old Testament is going to be satisfied in Christ. Every hope we had for God to be with us and save us and change us happens in Christ. Every prayer we've been praying for thousands of years is finding its fulfillment and its answer in Christ."

Then he says *this*. Look at what he says in verse 2 continued. **"Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight...'"** Some of you know this. Maybe others of you don't. He's talking about John the Baptist, the first Baptist. You could also call him the *Baptizer*.

Here's what he's saying. He's giving this old prophecy from the Old Testament that before the Messiah would come, God would send a messenger. Now let me give you context. Today, we're kind of spoiled with communication and travel. I'm still amazed that I can get on a plane, and in four and a half hours, I can be in San Diego. We can be on the other side of our nation in four or five hours. It's unbelievably easy.

Or you could go get in your car and... Who knows? You just take it for granted. You get on a couple of highways, and in two or three hours, you're at the beach or you're in the mountains or something like that. Well, this is a very new idea in human history.

Travel has, for most of human history, been unbelievably difficult for everybody, and almost nobody went more than a few miles from their house their whole lives.

We're really spoiled with communication today. Just put it on social media. Just send a text. Just make a phone call. It doesn't matter where you are. You can connect with anyone else. Well, back then, they didn't have either of those. So, why do you send a messenger? Here's what would happen. A new king would take over. Who knows why. Maybe the father died, and the son takes over.

Maybe a new king does a treaty, or something, and he gets territory of a whole new area, but the area is 20 or 30 miles away. They don't know the king is their king yet. So, what you did was you sent a messenger. Here's what I want you to understand as I'm going to explain this: Christians are to be the messengers today for King Jesus.

Here's what a messenger would do. A messenger would do two things. He would prepare the pathways, and he would prepare the people for the king. That's exactly what we do. So, *prepare the pathways*. Again, I told you, travel was hard back then, and some of these roads were in terrible condition. Basically, the messenger would go out, and he was like, "These roads need completely repaired. These roads don't even lead there anymore. These roads are overgrown."

Sometimes the messenger would come back and go, "Guys, there's a shorter way. There's a better way. It's going to cost some money, but we're going to cut this through here." Now how does this work for us today? Well, here's what this means. We are to help prepare the way for people to hear about Jesus. We'll see in a minute it's not that the message of Jesus is easy to hear. The message is offensive, but we want to make it easy, simple, and short for people to hear it.

Let me give you an example. This happens all the time. Somebody in our church, some of you... You'll email me or one of our staff, and you'll say something like this: "My cousin is very interested spiritually, but she's into the occult. What book should I get her?" What are you asking? "What is the best pathway to reach this person?" Here's why. Jesus is the only way, but there are many ways to Jesus.

Other people say, "Hold on, hold on. My daughter went to school, and she's getting really into science. She believes in Darwinian evolution. She's super into science. Is there any book on science and Christianity?" What are you asking? "Do you have a path?" When I was at UNCG... I was a brand-new minister there. It was my first year in full-time ministry. I was in the dorms at UNCG.

For some reason, God just blessed my ministry, and unbeknownst to me... I wasn't planning on this. I ended up having this large ministry to a bunch of black guys who

were freshmen in this one dorm. I would share the gospel with them, and we would do Bible study together. I had this thought. They loved rap. They loved hip-hop. I said to them one day, "Guys, I want to introduce you to Christian rap." They were like, "Those are two words I've never seen put together in my life: *Christian* and *rap*."

This was 15 years ago. This was right when, if you know these names, Lecrae and all of these others were coming out. Well, I saw God use Christian rap as a pathway, because it was the style they were used to, but it was the substance of the gospel. By the way, any parent who has more than one kid realizes how different every kid is.

Sometimes parents beat themselves up, because they're like, "Well, I did this with my one kid, and she believed. We sat down, and we talked, and we did devotions, and at 7 years old she believed. But then there's *this* kid over *here*, and I did the same thing, and it doesn't work." Well, let's keep praying, but let's try a different path. The reason we have age and stage ministries, the reason we try to give you so many resources is we're trying to give you as many paths as possible.

So, the first thing you do is prepare the path. The second thing you have to do is *prepare the people*. Now how do you do this? Well, it's hard. Sometimes what you do when you prepare people is you basically have to clarify the misunderstandings they currently have about King Jesus.

You know, you talk to someone, and they go, "I thought Jesus was just an example." You're like, "Oh, no, no, no, no. I mean, yes, there are some verses on how he died as an example. Yes, we are supposed to serve and suffer like him, but that's not the primary message." Or "I thought Jesus was just a great moral religious teacher." You're like, "No!" So, sometimes what you have to do when you prepare people is you have to clarify what their misunderstandings are.

Sometimes you have to help people interpret their past experiences. You meet people and they're de-churched. There are unchurched people. "I've never been to church." There are de-churched people. "I've been hurt by the church." Sometimes you have to help de-churched people interpret their experiences. We've had to do that a lot here at Two Cities. It's like, "Actually, that was not Christianity you experienced. You experienced religion, and I'm sorry. You were hurt by religious people."

Sometimes they were hurt by their own parents. It's like, "You grew up in a fundamentalist, moralistic, overly conservative, not Christian home. It was so fundamental you churned your own butter." (That's a sign of fundamentalism: churning your own butter.) The whole point is this is what you have to do for people. You have to prepare the road. Sometimes you have to cut a new road.

We don't just openhandedly accept all technology, but I want you to understand that what technology is, if you're thinking biblically, is it's a new road. Like, how did Billy Graham happen? Speaking from a divine perspective, God uniquely moved in the life of Billy Graham. Humanly speaking, it was also nice that we had sound amplification and big stadiums, because we were able to use them.

People are on the front lines of "How do we use podcasts? How do we use YouTube? How do we use social media? How do we use the Internet?" If you're thinking biblically, you realize all that stuff can be dangerous, and all that stuff can end up being pathways to get the gospel to people.

So, here's what we have. We have a straight path, but we don't have a soft message. Look at what John does in verse 4. ***"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins."*** John's message... This is the message we have. We're going to be unpacking this message over the next 20 weeks.

We're going to see the message John has is the exact same message Jesus has, which is the exact same message Peter and Paul and the disciples will preach after Jesus dies and rises from the dead and heads to heaven. It's a message of repentance. We don't like the word *repentance*. I bet outside of the church you're never going to hear the word *repent* or *repentance*.

That's because the number-one value in our society today is tolerance. Now, up until about 20 years ago, tolerance used to be something Christians could agree on, because *tolerance* used to mean, "I disagree with you, and I think you're wrong, but I will endure you and put up with you, and hopefully you'll endure me and put up with me." That's the way a society has to function, because there are different belief systems. That's what happens in a pluralistic society. You have to have tolerance.

Well, today, tolerance has completely changed. We have a new definition. Today, *tolerance* means "I affirm you. I accept you. I approve you. I celebrate you no matter what your ideology is, what your perspective is, what your blatant sin is, what your alternative lifestyle is." You'll see this anywhere you're... If you're at a progressive college campus...

Some of you work at a progressive workplace, and you have to put up with diversity training and everything else. What happens in those environments... Watch this next time. The person who is the most mature... The person who is a role model for everybody else in society today is the person who can put up with the most goofy and gross things and act like nothing is wrong.

We say things like *they/them*, and we act like that's normal. We let 10- and 11-year-olds take puberty blockers, and we let young girls get double mastectomies, and we cut off healthy limbs. We say, "Whatever feels good, and whatever you want to do, I'm going to act like everything is okay."

In response to that, the Christian perspective is repentance, which is a harder word. Repentance is "You're wrong." Repentance is "I'm wrong." Repentance is "You're the problem." Repentance is "I'm the problem." Repentance is "You need to change." Repentance is "I need to change." This is the message John preaches. It's a message of repentance.

Now, what is repentance? Let's talk about what it's not. Repentance is not just hating your sin. I mean, you don't have to be a Christian to hate your sin. I think every person has some time (usually 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning) when they wake up, and their conscience is condemning them. Everybody else is sleeping. Whether they're a Christian or not, they're like, "Why am I doing this? Why am I being so deceitful? Why am I so addicted? My conscience is plaguing me, and I hate this."

Well, that's not repentance. Repentance isn't even leaving your sin. I mean, people can do that. You'll meet a non-Christian. Non-Christians have their own "testimonies." "I used to be addicted to this substance. I used to gamble. I used to be a workaholic," and they left it. That's not repentance. True biblical repentance is "I turn from my sin, and I turn to my Savior." It's both/and. It's "I turn away from something, but I'm turning to my Savior instead."

Here's another way to think about repentance. Repentance is a change of mind and heart that leads to a change of behavior. If you want a modern word... If you're talking to someone about repentance, and they go, "This doesn't make any sense. I've never heard this word before. That sounds like an archaic, old-fashioned, oppressive word," then use *this* phrase instead: *paradigm shift*. It's the same thing as repentance.

People go, "I had a paradigm shift. I think about sex differently; therefore, it affects my marriage, and it affects my singleness." "I had a paradigm shift with money." That's the same thing as repentance. It's like, "When I read the Scriptures, I understand money differently, and then it changes my mind, and it changes my heart, and eventually, it shows itself in changing my hands."

We live in a society that doesn't really believe in repentance, but we believe in rehab. We're not against rehab. Okay? Rehab can be helpful. But that's the world's answer. Instead of repentance, it's rehabilitation. We send them to prison. Rehabilitation.

That's kind of the prison thing. Hopefully they'll be rehabilitated in the next 10 or 12 years in prison.

Or they go to rehab because they check themselves in, or their family confronted them and said, "Dad, it's a problem. You've got to go away for six or eight weeks somewhere in Arizona," and Dad does that. Sometimes that makes a big change, but what you often see after rehab is relapse, because unless you get to the heart issue, unless you get to the core issue, unless you get to the paradigm shift, unless you get to the turning and trusting, there's no long-term change.

Repentance also isn't the same as rebranding. I don't know if you've heard of *this*. Most of us probably don't have the finances to do the rebranding, but in the celebrity culture and in the sports culture, they talk about rebranding. Rebranding is "My image has gotten bad because of something I did." Maybe someone had an affair. Maybe someone got caught doing something. Maybe someone got a DUI, and they will literally...

I found this out this week. Because they have a ton of money, they will literally hire a PR firm. There are PR firms that only exist to help celebrities and sports people rebrand their image. Rebranding my image is "Can you do a bunch of stuff on the exterior so that everybody thinks I'm a different person?" I don't know if Kobe Bryant had a real heart change or not, but he would be a good example of...

There was this whole incident. I won't go into it. He ends up apologizing for some things. This was years ago. He ends up apologizing publicly to his wife, and from that day forward, he switches his jersey. He never wears number 8 again; he wears number 24. Well, what is that? It's partly rebranding. Maybe there was an internal change, but it was "Hey, I'm going to do something on the outside, and hopefully everyone will think I'm changed on the inside."

Repentance is "I'm going to change on the inside. Eventually, it's going to be noticeable to everybody on the outside." So, John preaches repentance. Look. Verse 5: ***"And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."*** It's interesting that it's in the River Jordan.

The Jordan River was the barrier between the wilderness and the Promised Land. It's where Israel crossed over right before they went into the Promised Land. There's a lot of symbolism in the New Testament. Basically, it's a reminder that just as Moses led the people out of the wilderness into the Promised Land, Jesus Christ is our greater deliverer giving us a greater exodus.

Look at verse 5. ***"And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins."*** Verse 7: ***"And he preached, saying, 'After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'"***

If you read the other three gospels (again, I told you Mark is very fast paced), you get the longer preaching and teaching John does in the wilderness at the Jordan River. Let me just say this. The two things we see in these verses I just read you is that he's very humble in regard to himself. He humbles himself, and he exalts Christ.

He says, "I'm not worthy to untie Jesus' sandal." That was the lowest of the lowest of the lowest of the lowest servant's job. You don't want that job. After everybody has been walking around and has dirt and feces on their feet all day long, you're the low-level servant who has to clean off the feces, clean the sandals, and get everything ready for them to go back out.

Well, John says, "Jesus is so unbelievably amazing I'm not even worthy to be the lowest servant in his house." Here's a principle for us. John doesn't try to look like Jesus (in fact, he'll say other places, "I'm not the Christ"), but he looks very much like somebody who needs Jesus. I think that's the role of Christians. I mean, we want to act like we look like Jesus, and we should.

Over time, you're going to look more like Jesus. That's called *sanctification*. But if we're honest, we're faking it. We're pretending. We're performing. The truth is we need Jesus. True evangelism is evangelism that goes, "Dude, my life is a mess as well. God is working on me, bringing order. I am a broken person, and God is putting my life back together. I am a sinner, and God has forgiven me. I am struggling, and I am a work in progress." That's attractive. That's what John does.

Then he exalts Christ. He basically says a version of this: "Jesus is bigger than your suffering, and he's better than your sin." Here's what's so powerful. All of the commentators notice this, whether it's Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. It's the moment of John the Baptist humbling himself and exalting Christ that catapults Jesus into the public eye and into public ministry. I just think of the power of each of us humbling ourselves, whether it's in our home, at work, or with our friends, and exalting Christ.

Here's what happens next. Jesus comes to get baptized. Look at verse 9. ***"In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'"***

A good Bible reader is a confused Bible reader. If you read this, you should probably be thinking something like, "Wait a second. The message John gave to get baptized is 'Repent and confess your sins.' So why would Jesus get baptized?" Which is a fair question to ask. In fact, we see in one of the other accounts in one of the other gospels, John basically says, "I shouldn't baptize you," and Jesus says, "We have to do this to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus didn't have any sins to confess. He didn't have anything to repent of. The reason Jesus was baptized was so he could fully identify with sinful humanity and so he could fully obey God the Father. Now, here's why this is so important. We're going to do a little theology together for a few minutes here. I think this is something Christians don't often understand.

We talk, especially in our church and churches like our church, a lot about Jesus dying for us. Sometimes we even forget the resurrection. We're like, "Jesus died for us." It's like, "Well, where is he?" "Oh, he also rose from the dead." We forget the resurrection.

Think about this. If we were to gather our three brightest kids in the kids' ministry... We were like, "They get it. They're in kids' ministry, and they're in a great family. They know the gospel." We pulled them up here. We put them onstage and said, "Now, kids, I want you to tell us. What did Jesus do for you?"

If they said, "Jesus died on the cross to forgive my sins, and he rose from the dead, so now I can have hope and go to heaven," we would be like, "Yes!" and that would be a great answer. The only thing they forgot was Jesus' life, which is what we forget. Even the old creeds... The old creeds say, "He was born of a virgin. He suffered under Pontius Pilate. He was crucified, dead, and buried, and on the third day he rose." Guess what they forgot: his whole life!

This is so important. Here's the thing. Jesus didn't just die for you; he lived for you. This is what Mark is trying to show you. Here's some more theology for a second. What happened at the cross? Let's use the debt terms, because Jesus uses debt. "Forgive us our debts." Think of sin as a debt. That's a good way, because we all kind of understand debt. We've all probably had some type of debt in our lives.

Basically, the whole idea is when Jesus dies on the cross, you go from \$10 billion in debt back to zero. You go, "Thank God." That's why we celebrate the cross. What the cross did is it forgave us and got us back to zero. "Thank God." The problem is God wants two things from your life. God wants your sins to be forgiven and your life to be perfect.

Well, okay. The cross handled my sins being forgiven, but I also need someone to live the perfect life. We see this. This is what Mark wants to show us. Turn with me to verse 12. Here's what it says: ***"The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him."***

He goes through water into the wilderness to be tempted. Can you think of anybody else who went through water (the people of Israel) into the wilderness to be tempted? Do you see what Jesus is doing? Why 40 days? He's symbolically representing the 40 years that Israel was in the wilderness.

So, Jesus goes into the wilderness, and he obeys where Adam and Eve failed, he obeys where Israel failed, and he faces the temptation of Satan. Now, here's what we see immediately. We're going to see this in the rest of the book. There's a battle of two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Satan shows up, and he immediately tempts Jesus.

Now, we live in this interesting society. We're going to have to get used to this, because over the next 20 weeks, we are going to see a lot of exorcisms. We're going to see a lot of demon possession. We're going to see a lot of demons cast out and healings being done. We're going to see a lot of temptation by Satan.

We live in this crazy, we might say, disenchanted world where we don't believe in the supernatural anymore. The truth is that's not even true, because if you talk to people, they believe in heaven; they just don't believe in hell. They believe in God in some form; they just don't believe in Satan. They believe in angels; they just don't believe in demons. People believe in forgiveness (they cry when it's shown in movies); they just don't believe in sin.

What's happening here is we're seeing Satan tempt Jesus. Again, you have to go (and I encourage you to) read Matthew and Luke for some of the longer accounts of the temptation, but here's what I want you to know about temptation for your life, because we see this in the ministry of Jesus. Temptation is always unbelievably personal. We have a personal, intelligent, evil enemy named Satan.

This is why your temptations... You're like, "It's so personal to me." Things will tempt you that would not be tempting to me. Things will tempt me that are not tempting to you at all. You go, "Oh my goodness. Why does this temptation happen every time my spouse leaves? How did this trip get organized that my business partner couldn't come, and I ended up being alone on this trip?" I don't know how you explain the unique temptations in our lives, as well as all of the evil things we see in society, apart from the demonic.

What Jesus does is he goes into the wilderness, and he perfectly obeys in those temptations that were unique to him. It was unique temptation. "You're hungry? Make food. God just said you're his Son? Prove it." These are all unique temptations of Jesus. Then it says in another gospel account that Satan left him until there was going to be an opportune time to tempt him.

So, here's what has happened so far in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus comes into public ministry, gets baptized, goes into the wilderness, and fights temptation. Now in verse 14, we begin to see his public ministry. Look at verse 14. ***"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"***

Jesus comes preaching. (We're going to see more of this next week.) John comes preaching. In fact, next week, there are going to be all of these people who need healed, and he goes, "All right. We have to go to the next town, because I need to preach." His healing ministry was there to serve his preaching ministry.

I don't know a lot about a lot of things, but I know a little bit about preaching. Let me tell you the difference between preaching and teaching. You've experienced a lot of teaching in your life. Your whole life has probably been "Sit in classroom and get teaching." Teaching is something like *this*: "Learn all this information. There will be a test. Learn all of these interesting facts. Increase your knowledge in this area." That's teaching.

Some of what I do up here is teaching, but the main thing is preaching. Here's what preaching is: "I want you to do something with this. I want you to respond to this. You need to do something with what I'm telling you." That's what Jesus is saying here. So, John preaches about baptism and repentance. Jesus comes, and do you see what he preaches?

Some of you have heard this many times. Let me unpack it. He says, ***"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent..."*** There's that repentance again. ***"...and believe in the gospel."*** Let's talk about each of those. First, Jesus comes and says, "The time is fulfilled." We're going to go into the Greek here for a moment, the original language. There are two words for *time* in the Greek. There's *chronos* and there's *kairos*.

When you hear *chronos*, what do you hear? *Chronologically*. That's where we get the word *chronologically*. The word *chronos* basically means sequential time. It's the more common word used in general when you ask, "What time is it?" That would be the word *chronos*. The word *kairos* means significant or special time. *Kairos* is not used very often. It means "This is a unique moment in history."

How would this work in English? It would be the difference between the words *historical* and *historic*. Broadcasters and sports announcers... People don't use the categories right. Every once in a while, someone will go, "That game last night was historical." Every game that has ever been played is historical. What you meant was it was a historic game.

Everything that happens in your life is historical (*chronos*), but you can look over your life or the life of a nation, and then you go, "Oh, that was a *kairos* moment." A lot of us in here are old enough to remember... I remember exactly where I was when 9/11 happened. That was a *kairos* moment. The beginning of COVID was a *kairos* moment. It's like, "This is significant, and it's going to change things for a while, maybe for the rest of human history, the way we do things and deal with things."

As soon as 9/11 happened... I remember my dad flying, and he would get home from a trip, and we would go right through TSA and welcome him at the gate. That doesn't happen anymore. Unfortunately, we all have to take our shoes off, and all this, with TSA nowadays, because that was a *kairos* moment that changed everything.

Jesus basically says, "The time is fulfilled." *Fulfilled* means literally overflowing or to the brim. Jesus himself says, "This is a unique moment in history." Jesus is self-aware and spiritually aware of how unique his life, his death, and his resurrection are going to be. You know this. We've actually always recognized this.

Growing up, there was *BC* and there was *AD*. Do you remember that? Nowadays, they've changed it to *BCE* and *CE*. Are you familiar with this? Here's what I think it means: "Before Christ's Empire" and "Christ's Empire." I still think of it that way. But think of it *this* way. You guys can't write your birthday or today's date without in some ways referencing Christ.

So, Jesus says the *kairos* is fulfilled. This moment is the most important moment in history. Then he says, "The kingdom of God is at hand." It's going to take us, seriously, the rest of the 20 weeks to unpack the phrase the *kingdom of God*. Some of you are into this. If you're into nerdy, theological debates, there are all of these kinds of questions on the kingdom of God and how much the kingdom of God is connected to the church. We'll deal with some of that.

There's another question: How much of the kingdom of God is in the future? How much of it is a future hope (like, we're heading into the kingdom of God), and how much of it is a present reality? Well, there are a lot of different questions, but let me tell you what the kingdom of God tells us. It tells us at least two things.

You need to know this, because the kingdom of God is the main thesis and thrust of all Jesus' teaching. I mean, this is his message. His message is "The kingdom is here." His message is not "Ask me into your heart." His message is not "Say a prayer." His message is "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and enter it." That's his message.

So, what is the kingdom of God? It's the reign and rule of God, but here's what the kingdom tells us. You don't have to be a Christian to understand the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God lets us know two things. First, something has gone wrong with this world. That's why we pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done..." We live in a broken world.

All you have to do is watch the news or go on your social media and, over across time, see what's happening in the lives of people you're connected to. Every once in a while, you see these horrible things, and you think to yourself, "Oh, thank God it wasn't us." We have two major hospitals in our city. All you have to do is walk through the hospitals. Go over to the kids' cancer center, and you just walk around.

We all have those moments in our lives where we're like, "This is not the way things are supposed to be." So, that's the first thing about why we need the kingdom. The second thing is we realize (this takes us a long time, and we're still figuring this out) we can't fix it. During the Enlightenment maybe it was...

I'm no historian, but during the Enlightenment, there was kind of this "All we need is more education. That's what we need." We still think that. "If we could just educate these people, whoever they are... Let's make education affordable. Let's just educate them from the youngest age possible." Guess what we found out at the end of the Enlightenment. All we made was smart sinners.

Then we said, "Okay. It's not education. Maybe it's education a little bit, but what it is is we need more science, and we need more technology." Then what did we have at the end of the twentieth century? Some of the worst wars we've ever had, because the technology was so good to kill each other. We just had very technologically advanced, very scientifically astute sinners.

Here's the best definition of the kingdom I've heard. The kingdom is the future age breaking into the present age. What we see in the ministry of Jesus is exactly that. When Jesus calms the storm, what we're seeing is Jesus is saying, "You're right. We shouldn't have storms. We shouldn't have hurricanes and tornadoes. These are the growing pains of living in this world."

When he calms the storm, it's a picture of the kingdom breaking in. When he heals somebody, he's like, "You're right. There won't be any hospitals in heaven. I'm going to restore this person so you can see this is how the kingdom comes." One day, we're all going to get new bodies. When he offers forgiveness of sins to people publicly, he's saying, "I'm reversing the effects of sin and suffering in the world."

So, every time Jesus confronts falsehood with truth, every time he confronts good with evil, you see the kingdom breaking in. This is why he teaches us to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done." If you want to see God's kingdom come... My guess is, if you're a Christian, you'd go, "I want to see his kingdom. I want to see his kingdom come in my house. I want to see his kingdom come in my business."

Here's the key: where you want to see the kingdom come, God's will must be done. You're like, "Maybe I don't want to see his kingdom come, because maybe I don't want to do the things..." "I want to see your kingdom come in my marriage." Do you want to serve and suffer and sacrifice like Christ in your marriage? "I don't want to do that." Then you're not going to see the kingdom come. The kingdom comes as the will of God is done.

So, this is Jesus' message. He says, "Repent and believe in the gospel." Look at what he does next. Verse 16: ***"Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee..."*** By the way, that was a very famous place to go fishing. Even to this day, there are exotic fish caught there that are caught nowhere else.

"...he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen." It's interesting. We can't tell for sure, but we think maybe upwards to seven of the twelve disciples were fishermen. Here are four of them. Verse 17: ***"And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me...'"***

This is also part of the kingdom. How do you enter the kingdom? You enter the kingdom by beginning to follow Jesus. ***"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."*** Notice he calls them to a *person*, he calls them to a *process* (it's going to take three and a half years), and he calls them to a *purpose*.

"And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him."

There are a couple of things I want us to notice. First of all, you wouldn't understand this unless you knew the context back then. Back then, rabbis never chose their

disciples. Disciples always chose their rabbis. So, Jesus is doing something unique in calling these people to follow him.

Normally, what would happen was you'd go to the best schools, and you'd get the best education, and you'd be the smartest student. You'd memorize the most Bible. You'd network all of your connections, and you'd get to Rabbi [Whoever], and you would try to impress that rabbi.

You'd try to say, "Here's what I do, and here's what I did. Here's what I know, and here's what I'm good at. Here's how awesome I am. Can I be your disciple?" Then the rabbi would decide "No" or "Yes." Jesus does something else. He's the first rabbi in history who chooses his disciples. The disciples don't choose him.

He calls out to these men. Here's what's interesting. A lot of times when we think about the disciples... We only have what we know in the Gospels, but a lot of times, you hear the disciples and think, "Man, he chose a ragtag bunch of nobodies." There's some truth to that. They certainly were young.

But what we can tell from *these* guys is they were wealthy fishermen. "Kyle, how do you know that?" Well, we know that by the types of nets they were using. It says they were casting the net out. That's what wealthy people did. The poor fishermen had a different net. They had to jump in the water with the fish, and they had to go under the water and try to catch fish. They were cheaper nets.

Secondly, we know they were wealthy because it looks like their father Zebedee owned a business. Thirdly, we know they were wealthy because of where they were fishing. They were fishing in the Sea of Galilee, which was where the best and most expensive fish were often caught and exported. Fourthly, we know they were wealthy because they had hired servants.

Jesus' heart was for the least and last and leftovers in society. He had a very socioeconomically diverse group of people who followed him and he discipled, but the reason I say this is because, oftentimes... Who does Jesus call? Who are Jesus' first disciples in the gospel of Mark? Successful businessmen. Who in our society today are the last people you find following Jesus Christ? The successful businessmen.

Partly because... Do you know what we've done? We have over-spiritualized the language of following Jesus. "Do you want to ask Jesus into your heart? Do you want to make disciples?" He speaks the language these guys can understand. "I want you to follow me, and I want you to leverage the skills you have for my kingdom." It's like, "Man, we need more of *that*."

The gospel has gone forward in large part, yes, on the missionaries and the church planters who were willing to go out and send it, but also on all of the businessmen and women who were willing to leverage everything they had for Christ and his kingdom. That's what we see here.

So, Jesus calls these men. We see the authoritative call. They just respond. It's unbelievable. From John's gospel we think maybe they saw Jesus before this, but that's not the point Mark is trying to make. Mark is trying to make the point of the authority of Jesus Christ. He calls, and they respond.

Look at what happens next. ***"And they went into Capernaum..."*** Most people think this is where Jesus spent most of his time. This was his home base: Capernaum. ***"...and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching."*** So, Jesus cares about the church. Jesus cares about Sunday worship. So he's doing that.

"And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes." So, Jesus comes, and he has authority. I actually think this is what we're longing for in our society today: for authority. I know we live in this anti-authority age where it's like, "Don't tell me what to do," but do you know what I think at the end, especially young people?

I think they are dying inside for someone to speak with authority. Not just "This is my opinion" or "This is what I think" or "This is an idea." I think young people are going, "Does anybody know what they're doing? Does anybody know where they're going? Does anybody have the answers?" Jesus says, "I do. Follow me." They're unbelievably attracted to authority.

Look at what happens next. Verse 23: ***"And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit [a demonic spirit]. And he cried out..."*** Sometimes the demonic shows up at church and tries to distract. That happens all the time. Look here.

"What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying..." Literally, in the Greek, "Shut up." I know we're not allowed to say that. I know it's not polite, but that's what Jesus literally says to him.

"...and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying out with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.'

And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee. And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John." It's a good idea to bring Jesus home with you. Maybe some miracles will happen in your house if you invite Jesus into your home. This is what happens here. "Now Simon's mother-in-law..."

Now, you know Simon Peter is considered the first pope, and you understand that Catholics tell popes and priests and bishops and cardinals they can't get married. You understand that Peter has a mother-in-law. There's only one way you get one of those. You have to get married. I'm just pointing out the obvious here.

"Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening at sundown they brought to him all who were sick or oppressed by demons. And the whole city was gathered together at the door."

They didn't come until nighttime because they were good Jews who wouldn't travel on the Sabbath. So, at the end of the Sabbath they come to Jesus. *"And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him."*

The book ends with what's called the *Messianic Secret motif*. (Listen. If you can order a Venti Caramel Macchiato, you can remember that.) It's this idea. It's found in Mark. It's that nobody knows who Jesus is, and when somebody finds out who Jesus is, he doesn't let them tell anybody. You go, "What is this? Isn't this the opposite of the Great Commission? Aren't we supposed to go into all the world and tell everybody?" Yes, but here's the thing: they don't fully understand who Jesus is yet.

It's not until Jesus goes to the cross... In fact, it's not actually until Mark 8, when Jesus tells them he's going to suffer and die, that he then begins to let them tell others about him. He begins to send them out two by two. It's not until we get the Great Commission... It isn't until the very end, when Jesus Christ is at the cross dying for our sins, rising from the dead, and then we proclaim his person and his message.

Now look. We're just beginning. Get ready, because we're going to be in this series for the next 19 weeks after this. Imagine you're moving into a hotel room, and you're unpacking all of the suitcases into the drawers, because we're going to be here for a while. I'd be remiss not to end with a couple of things as we close here. The first is I want us to notice about Jesus that he meets people where they are. Do you see that? Jesus met people three places, and it's the three places he'll meet *you*.

First, he meets people in the *wilderness*. That's the first place Jesus goes. It's the first two places we see him. He's in the wilderness, because that's where he'll meet you. Most people who come to Christ come to Christ in the wilderness. "I'm in the wilderness of my marriage. It's a dry desert out here. I'm in the wilderness in my finances. I'm in the wilderness in my sin struggle. I'm in the wilderness in my job. I got caught. My marriage is falling apart." God will meet you in the wilderness.

The second place God meets people is at *work*. It's like, dude, there they are, the first four disciples. They're at work. Guess where God is going to meet most people in our city: at work. Guess where most of your witness should be: at work. Of course. They had no idea when they were going to work for Wake Forest Baptist that they were going to meet you and then meet Jesus.

The third place God meets people is at the *home*. That's what he does with the mother-in-law of Simon. There she is. She has needs. He meets her at home. So, the first thing I want us to see is God meets us where we are. Secondly, I want us to see the call to enter the kingdom of God. We enter the kingdom of God on our knees. All we bring to our salvation is our sin. We need to receive, and we need to enter the kingdom of God.

What this always means is leaving something. This is why we said to have a new beginning you have to have a necessary ending. For them, they had to leave their nets. They had to leave their family. I don't know what you need to leave to follow Christ, but what we're doing as a church family is we are about the kingdom. We are not playing church here. Our desire is to see the kingdom advance, and the kingdom breaks through every time the church advances. So let's pray together.

Lord, we just pray for that. We pray for our church to advance. We know that the kingdom goes forward one prayer at a time, one gospel conversation at a time, one testimony at a time, one Bible study at a time, one conversation at a time. We pray all this in Jesus' name, amen.