

## Walking in Circles, Part 2 – Believe

### I. Introduction

- a. Tonight I'm wrapping up this short two-part series entitled Walking in Circles.
- b. If you're new to NDC or you missed last week...you weren't the only one. I understand, I am no match for Tim Tebow!
- c. But if you missed last week I would encourage you to go back and listen to it online at [newdenver.org](http://newdenver.org). These two weeks really go together as one message.
- d. I'll take some time this week to recover some things I talked about last week that are necessary to make sense of where we're going tonight, but to get the most out of this series you really have to listen to both parts.
- e. So last week we talked about the phenomenon of walking in circles. If you've ever spent any time outside in very remote or wooded areas you may have had this experience. You think you're headed in the right direction toward your intended destination, but you catch sight of a tree or rock that looks familiar and realize that you're walking in circles.
- f. Maybe it's happened to you while driving in a new city. You make a turn and end up going in a circle.
- g. Scientists who have studied this tell us that when our brain lacks clear and recognizable points of reference (like when you're hiking on a cloudy day or driving in a new city), it makes small errors in judgment about direction. We think we're moving forward, making progress, but we're just going in circles.
- h. But this isn't just a navigational phenomenon; it's a metaphor for times in our life. As you think back about your life, you can probably think about times when you were trying to make progress in an area but just felt like you were walking in circles. Maybe you're there now:
  - i. Maybe you feel like you're working hard at your job but you never seem to progress or advance like you'd like. Maybe you've even changed jobs, and it's the same story over and over.
  - ii. Maybe for you it's relationships. You've dated person after person, but they all seem like the same person. Or maybe you're on your second or third marriage, and regardless how much you want things to be different each time it just seems the same.
- i. Whatever the situation, can all think back to times in our life that felt like that, and to some degree or another we are probably there now in some area of our life.
- j. We want to move forward, but as hard as we try we're just walking in circles. So what can we do about it?

- k. Tonight we're going to go back to the book of Mark to look at Jesus' first words as he began his public ministry, because I think that what he has to say is incredibly helpful at answering that question.
- l. So if you have your Bible, turn with me to the book of Mark, chapter one.
- m. If you don't have a bible you can grab one of the black ones from the seat in front of you and flip to page 699 or you can just follow along on the screen.

## II. Scripture

- a. I went through some of the background info about the book of Mark last week so I won't go through it all again, but I will remind you of where the verses we're looking at take place in the life of Jesus to give you a little context.
- b. In the verses immediately preceding these, Mark relates that Jesus was just baptized by a man named John, signifying the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. John was a prophet – a man who began speaking and proclaiming a message he said was given to him by God. His message was simple: "Get ready. The kingdom of God is coming. The king we've been waiting for will be here soon."
- c. When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John looked at Jesus and said, "This is the person we've been waiting for. This is the messiah. He is the one who is after me but is greater than me." John is essentially conferring all his authority on Jesus, playing his role as the prophet who would announce the Messiah, the long-expected king.
- d. So Jesus, who is virtually unknown at this point, suddenly has everyone looking at him wondering what Jesus would say.
- e. In fact, soon after John baptizes Jesus he is arrested for speaking out against Herod, the king of Israel set in place by the Romans.
- f. So most of John's followers are now Jesus' followers, and he has an audience of people listening. What does he say? Picking up in verse 14 of Mark 1:
- g. *14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. (Mark 1:14)*
- h. So after John goes to prison, Jesus begins his public ministry. He goes to Galilee in the northern part of Israel and begins to proclaim "the good news of God."
- a. Now the little Greek word behind that phrase "good news" is important. The word Mark uses here, quoting Jesus is *euaggelion* (yoo-ang-ghel-ee-on). It literally means "good news." Depending on what translation of the Bible you have, your Bible may say "gospel" here. Gospel is old English for "good news." From the time that the Bible was translated into English this word "gospel" has often been used in place of "good news."
- b. The problem is that the word "gospel" is a bit of a loaded word. Depending on who you talk to you may get a different definition or

understanding of what that word means. But literally here in this verse it's simply saying that Jesus is proclaiming good news.

- i. So what is this gospel, or "good news," that Jesus proclaims? Verse 15:
- j. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near." (Mark 1:15)
- k. Now I walked through this last week, but this is so critical to where we're going tonight that I'm going to take the time to explain this verse again.
- l. First off let's talk about time. Jesus says here "the time has come." But what is interesting is the word for time that he chooses.
- m. In Greek there are two words for time – *chronos* and *kairos*.  
Chronos is a general reference to time. It's where our English word *chronology* comes from. So *chronos* refers to a time or a period of time. Seconds, minutes, hours, days, etc.
- n. *Kairos* refers to a specific, significant moment or occasion. The day you graduated. Your wedding day. The day your child was born. These aren't just days; they are significant days. They aren't just *chronos* moments; they are *kairos* moments.
- o. Jesus says "The *kairos* has come." This is the moment you've been waiting for. The kingdom of God has come near.
- p. Now this statement would have made a big impression on Jesus' first audience. You see Israel had been waiting for, expecting, hoping for a Messiah, or anointed king, to come and usher in a new kingdom.
- q. But that term doesn't have as much meaning for those of us who grew up with participative democracy as our paradigm for government, we need to think a little bit about what this idea of the kingdom of God means.
- r. So who remembers the 3 things necessary to have a kingdom?
  - i. A king – You can't have a kingdom without a king. The king is the one who rules a kingdom. His authority is absolute.
  - ii. A place – A kingdom refers to a real place.
  - iii. A people – You can't have a kingdom without subjects.
- s. So a kingdom is a real place where a king actively rules over his subjects, and the will of the king is done.
- t. So the kingdom of God is a real place where God actively rules over his people, and the will of God is done.
- u. This is important, because if you're going to understand Jesus you need to think about what he means by the kingdom of God. During his time on earth Jesus talked about the kingdom of God more than any other subject.
- v. The more he talked the more it was clear that this kingdom Jesus proclaimed was in *direct opposition* to the values operative in the kingdoms of this world:
  - i. The world teaches that *might makes right*. Natural selection says that only the strong survive. But Jesus says that in his

kingdom, God, the king, uses his power to care for the powerless. The meek will inherit the earth, and the merciful will be shown mercy.

- ii. The world teaches look out for yourself, love your friends, and hate your enemies. Jesus says that in his kingdom you look out for others' needs, as well as your own. You forgive your enemies. You love your neighbor as yourself.
- w. Jesus proclaims that this kingdom has *come near* – it's available to those to whom he's speaking. And he calls them to respond:
- x. *"Repent and believe the good news!"* (Mark 1:15)
- y. This short phrase sums up the basis of Jesus' message, the message his followers took out into the world, and the message of all those who came after them, up to and including those of us at NDC.
- z. "The kingdom of God has come near; Repent and believe the good news."
- aa. Last week we looked at the first half of this call – the call to repent. Just to sum up what we said, to repent means simply to change your mind. About what? About whatever you encounter in life that is contrary to or in opposition to the kingdom of God.
- bb. Listen to how CS Lewis talked about this idea:  
*"Enemy occupied territory – that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage."*
- cc. So the world has taught you that you need to look out for yourself or no one else will. And along comes Jesus and says, "Think about the needs of others as well as yourself. Treat others the way you want to be treated. Love your neighbor as yourself."
- dd. When we encounter the conflicting messages of the world and the kingdom of God, Jesus says we are to repent – to change our mind – and to believe that the kingdom of God is near. So repentance is a change of mind, or attitude, or perspective. But what about belief? What is behind Jesus' call to believe?
- ee. Like "repent", "believe" is a word we need to look at closely. What does it mean to believe?
- ff. Often when we talk about belief, we're referring to a mental or intellectual exercise. We're giving credence to something – accepting it as true. This is a good thing, but it doesn't get at what Jesus was calling for when he said "repent and *believe*."
- gg. The word Jesus uses calls for belief *in* what he's saying. To not simply give it credence as true, but to place faith and confidence in it and act on it as if it were actually true.
- hh. Let me give you an illustration of the difference. [Move chair to center stage]
  - i. I believe that this chair will support me if I sit on it. I believe that is true. [Standing next to chair]

- ii. Now, I believe this chair will support me if I sit on it. I believe in this chair's ability to hold me. [Sit on the chair]
- iii. See the difference?
- ii. All we really *believe* is what we *do*.
- jj. This is so important, because it determines how you read this verse. If you think Jesus is simply calling for his hearers to give credence to this idea that the kingdom of God is at hand, then you can easily see this as a one-time event.
- kk. Many people read this verse this way. Many pastors teach it this way. I grew up hearing this verse taught this way. But I don't think that's what Jesus is saying.
- ll. The further I go in life the more I see Jesus' call to repent and believe as a lifelong process.
- mm. Do I believe that God has called me to love my wife sacrificially? Sure. I give credence to that I believe that it's true. Do I always love my wife sacrificially? No. Regularly I have to look at my actions as a husband and repent and believe that the kingdom of God is present.
- nn. I resonate deeply with the story that comes just a few chapters later in Mark 9. A father comes to Jesus, telling him about his son who has an affliction. He asks Jesus to help, if he can. Jesus says that all things are possible for those who believe. The man's reply is the cry of my heart every day – "I do believe; help my unbelief."
- oo. Jesus' call to repent and believe is an invitation to a lifelong journey of following him – learning to live more and more into the reality of the kingdom of God which is present and at hand, preparing for the day when Jesus returns to usher in its fullness.
- pp. So how do we do that? What does that process look like in our life. That's what I want to spend the rest of our time looking at.

### III. Conclusion

- a. As we've said, everyone has times when they feel like they're just not moving forward in life – that they are just walking in circles. Jesus' call to repent and believe that the kingdom of God is at hand is an invitation to walk a different kind of circle – a learning circle.
- b. **[Show blank timeline]** It begins by acknowledging that our lives are lived in time, *chronos* time – minutes, hours, days, years.
- c. But in our lives there are moments – *kairos* moments – that are significant and different. These moments can be positive – like your wedding day, or getting a new job. They can be negative – like the loss of a loved one or facing a serious illness. They can be big – like the birth of your children. Or they can be small – like a disagreement with a friend.
- d. I believe these moments come to us as opportunities from God. They are opportunities to learn, opportunities to grow, opportunities to live our lives more fully part of the kingdom of God. They are a chance to experience more of God and the abundant life he has for us and to stop walking around in circles.

- e. We seize these opportunities as we move through the “learning circle.”
- f. **[Show completed “Repent” half of circle]** We looked at the first half of the circle last week which represents Jesus’ call to repent. Very quickly, here’s how we do that:
  - i. We recognize a *kairos* moment in our life.
  - ii. We learn to pay attention – to **observe** the moments of our life. We ask ourselves questions like what are the highs and lows, where are we experiencing stress or peace, or what is occupying our thoughts.
  - iii. Once we observe these significant moments, we **reflect** on them. We dig deeper. *Why* does this moment seem important? What might God be trying to teach or tell me through this moment?
  - iv. Once we have an idea of what we think God may be trying to tell us, we **discuss** it with a trusted friend or group of friends. This provides us objectivity. It allows God to speak through those closest to us who know us best, and it protects us from our own rationalization and self deception.
- c. Last week I shared one example of how this process has worked in my life. A few weeks ago my family went up to the mountains for a few days to do some skiing. While we were there I noticed that conversations between my wife and I were very short and impatient. I thought about it, reflected on it, and realized that there was a pattern that had been going on. I talked to a friend about it, and they helped me realize that I had said something that was hurtful to Kate that I didn’t recognize. In that moment it was clear that what God wanted me to do was to seek reconciliation with my wife.
- g. So what did I do? That’s the second half of the circle – to believe, not just conceding what’s true, but acting on it.
- h. **[Show “Plan” step on the circle]** The first step is to decide, based on what God is saying or teaching you, what you need to do. Make a **plan** for what you need to do.
  - i. This can be very simple. In my case, my plan was simple – I needed to go have a conversation with my wife. I needed to apologize for how my words may have hurt her feelings. I needed to talk about how we can improve our communication.
  - j. **[Show “Accountability” step on the circle]** But just making a plan isn’t enough. I have a whole house full of projects that I plan on doing that never get done. If it’s going to get done, we’re going to need accountability. This is where having a trusted friend or group of friends that we can talk to is again so necessary – not just to clarify what God wants us to do, but to challenge us and give us the support we need to actually follow through.
- k. For me, the friend I talked through my situation with was the same person who followed up a couple weeks later to ask how that conversation went.

- l. God does not call us to journey alone. Without a trusted community of support we are more likely to misunderstand or misinterpret what God is telling us, and we are less likely to follow through with what he calls us to do. Do not journey alone. Please come talk to one of our staff or volunteers if you need to get connected. We'd love to help you make connections or get plugged into one of our groups where you can develop some quality friendships.
- m. **[Show "Act" step on the circle]** Finally, the last step of the circle is to act. To go and actually do the thing that God has set before you. This is true belief – to actually do what we believe is right.
- n. So what did I do in my story with Kate? I went to her, and I apologized for how my words had hurt her. We had a great conversation about what had happened, and there was healing and reconciliation in our marriage. We experienced a little taste of the kingdom of God coming to our marriage.
- o. But the amazing thing about this process is that one trip around the circle often leads to more. One kairos moment often leads to many more. Often we may just uncover bigger things that God is trying to change in our lives.
- p. For me I realized that my words which had hurt my wife were connected to some negativity and a critical nature inside of me. That's something that I'm going to have to walk around the circle a few times on – continuing to repent and to believe that the kingdom is at hand and available to me, allowing God to shape and change me in the process.
- q. This is not a formula to make your life perfect and carefree. In fact, God will likely lead you into some difficult places and call you to do some difficult things. But he calls you to these things so that you can experience the joy, the peace, the patience – the abundance of life he desires for us all to experience.
- r. Last week I invited you to start paying attention to your life – observing the kairos moments, reflecting on what those moments might mean, discussing with friends what God may be saying to you.
- s. Tonight as we close I'd like to invite you to continue that process by believing that the kingdom of God is present and available to you through those moments. Once you sense what God is calling you to do, make a plan. Discuss it with a friend who can challenge and support you with accountability. And then believe it – really believe it by acting.
- t. I believe that this is a journey God has called us to – to repent and believe that his kingdom is present and available to us. My prayer for you and to me is that we would have the eyes to see the kairos moments he sends our way and ears to hear when he whispers loving words of direction.
- u. Let's pray.