

“14 Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”” (Mark 1:14–15 NIV)
9/15/13 (Red Letters #1) **LETTERS OF REPENTANCE**

“I like Jesus, but not the church.” Have you ever heard those words, or something to that effect? It’s become sort of the “in” thing to be “spiritual” but not religious - connected to Jesus, but not the church. But who is the Jesus with whom people want to connect?

Sometimes you hear people say in religious discussions: “My Jesus wouldn’t say that.” Or “My Jesus isn’t like that.” Really? “My Jesus?” Folks, do you really have the right to create Jesus in your own image, or is it instead our privilege, to get to know the Jesus Who actually came into this world for us?

But images are powerful in our day and age. And we’ve grown up with many images of Jesus over the years, haven’t we? For instance at Christmas a lot of folks have an image of Jesus that looks something like this:

Slide: Little Lord Jesus meek and mild

Little Jesus meek and mild. And of course, He did come that way, but unfortunately a lot of folks try to keep Him there: little, meek and mild, unable to do much for you or to challenge you to do life differently. Some have this image of Jesus:

Slide: Symbolic Jesus (sort of a girlyman if you can say such a thing)

Slide: Jesus the Good Shepherd

Slide: The Jesus who suffered and died for us on the cross

Slide: Laughing Jesus

Slide: The Jesus who stands at the door and knocks

What about this one?

Slide: Jesus fighting the devil

Slide: Jesus as Buddha

And of course my personal favorite:

Slide: Plastic Jesus.

So who is Jesus really? What would Jesus do? What would Jesus say? In fact, I thought this was an interesting take on WWJD:

Slide: HDYKWJWDIYDKWJD?

Or, if you don’t know what He said? So what better way to discover who Jesus really is than through His own words? Not what people or politicians say about Him... Not my opinion – your opinion... Jesus’ own words. Printing the words of Jesus in red has been a feature of Bible translations for over 100 years... Our eyes notice the red letters as we read through the Bible, but what if we just kind of stuck to the **red letters** and worked our way all through the New Testament? Well, I’ve spent the last half of the summer putting that together. Starting today all the way through Christmas, we’re going look at the **Red Letters** of the Bible. I’ve organized them into categories that seem to go together, and I’ll be preaching on one of those each Sunday. I’ve also been developing a small group study for these categories that I hope to have finished and available next week. They’ll be great if you want to start a small group. I think it would also work well even as a family devotion. And I would pray simply that the “**Red Letters**” might become the “read letters.”

So let’s get to it. The first Red Letters I want to look at are

Slide: Letters of Repentance

The Bible says:

Slide: “14 Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”” (Mark 1:14–15 NIV)

What time has come? THE time. Folks, do you realize how arrogant that statement is, if Jesus is not the Christ, the Son of God who came into this world to save us from our sins? Paul put it this way:

Slide: “4 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.” (Galatians 4:4–5 NIV)

The Time. The time when God would reveal His plan to buy mankind back from sin and Satan; the time when Jesus would stand in the way of the righteous wrath of God against all the wrong that’s ever been done, and be punished for it instead of us so that we could be forgiven.

But He comes into our world with authority. And His message was not “do your own thing”, but “give up your own thing and do God’s thing.” Both John the Baptist and Jesus entered onto their respective stages with the word “**Repent.**” And folks, just as we have different images of Jesus, so we have different images of some of His **Red Letters**. For instance, in the days of Martin Luther the Roman Catholic Church, based on an inaccurate Latin translation of the Bible, was teaching that “repentance” meant “doing penance” – doing works to make up for your sins, as though it ever could. We’ll let Luther take care of that one – from the old film, Martin Luther, Heretic:

Slide: Martin Luther Repentance clip

Metanoiete. Change Mind. Change the way you think about life. Would “your Jesus” ask you to do that? Absolutely. He’s going to do it over and over and over again in all of the **Red Letters**. And we need to understand that right up front: when Jesus comes into your world, you have no choice but to change your mind about life. Because the letters of this world are not the letters of Jesus. What the world has presented to you as Truth is not the Truth of Jesus. And folks, if you’ve created Jesus in your own image, you’re going to be disappointed and disillusioned and despairing when your fake Jesus is exposed as just something that rested in your own shirt pocket. The Real Jesus is Bigger. The real Jesus is going to challenge you like no other, and He will comfort you like no other. In this series, we’ll read letters of hope and letters of humility, letters of judgment and letters of reward, letters of prayer and prophecy AND letters that will change your life!

So are you ready? Are you ready to say with the Psalmist:

Slide: “23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalms 139:23–24 NIV)

It’s not easy. It’s not natural to expose your life to scrutiny, to want to be examined so that you can change what’s wrong. But that’s what the real Jesus requires.

A woman stopped at a craft sale and at the sale she noticed a plaque that read: “**Prayer changes things.**” She liked that phrase and the way it was put together on the plaque, so she bought it and took it home and hung it prominently on a wall in their house. But after a couple of days she noticed one day that it no longer hung on the wall. She puzzled over it for a while and finally asked her husband about it. He admitted: “Yeah, I did that. I took it down.”

“Why?” she said, “Don’t you believe in prayer? Don’t you believe prayer changes things?”

“Well, yes.” He said. “But I just don’t like change.”

And unfortunately, we’re going to see that as Jesus shares His **Red Letters**, that response is going to be all too common – especially from church people...

So, how about you? Are you willing to change your mind, change your heart, change your life? Are you really? For instance most people would say, “Yes, I’d like to let go of my PRIDE.” Would you really? Wouldn’t you miss that feeling of superiority that comes over you once in a while? Wouldn’t you miss feeling a little bit richer than, prettier than, smarter than, better than... some people around you? We say we want to part with our pride but it feels kind of good once in a while to be superior, doesn’t it? Even if it’s only in our own minds?

How about ANGER? Wouldn’t some of us miss the adrenaline rush that accompanies our raging fits of ANGER? Wouldn’t some of us miss the excitement of our sexual fantasies if we were to let go of LUST? What would some of us do if we couldn’t satisfy our material desires the way we do now? Giving up ENVY and GREED sounds good until you get practical about it and it cuts into your buying patterns. Do you really want to let go of that? How many of us would jump for joy at the prospect of never overeating again? Giving up GLUTTONY sounds like a good idea, except a lot of us are going out for brunch – and we want to get our money’s worth at that buffet table... How about SLOTH? We really should get the lawn mowed, or the laundry folded or the homework done, but there’s a game on...and look at that cute kitten on Facebook!

Folks, in addition to the fact that Satan is after you, do you know what one of the biggest obstacles to change in your life is? It’s you! Because even though your sins and flaws cause you and others enormous pain, you’ve had ‘em for a long time. They’re like an old pair of shoes. They’re worn out and ready to be thrown away...but you don’t really want ‘em away. The truth is you kinda like ‘em. They’re comfortable. We don’t want to let ‘em go. The fact is that we don’t want to repent.

But folks, do the cost analysis. What are those sins costing you? How about your pride? If you continue to make your spouse or your family feel small... If you’re always one-upping everybody... What toll is that going to take your my relationships in the future? How is your pride going to affect your spiritual life? Where you keep saying, “I don’t need you God, I don’t need your grace, I don’t need your salvation.” Do you see how **eternally expensive** that sin can be when you hold onto it – when you don’t change your mind about it and ask God to remove it?

How about anger? What is your anger costing you in life? How many more rages and angry words do you think your spouse can take before she walks out or he walks out. How much more damage are you going to do to your children as they grow up learning that their home is not a safe place and that their parent isn’t there to love them and protect them but to be appeased and pleased at all costs.

How much pain are you going to accumulate by hanging onto your character flaws, your sins before you answer Jesus’ call to repent – to be willing to let Jesus change you. And He is ready and willing and able to do it. Now, Jesus said, “**Repent – AND BELIEVE THE GOOD NEWS!**” We heard the Good news in the earlier reading, the Lost and Found chapter of the Bible, Luke 15. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered it, but we ought to shout it from the rafters: “**This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.**” And He doesn’t wait for us

to come to Him. The Good Shepherd searches for the lost sheep, the woman searches for the coin. The Father runs out to meet his son. And oh, how he celebrates - when we answer these red letters.

Slide: “10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:10 NIV)

God throws a party in heaven for you – when you change your mind and your heart and come to Him. Folks, God is in the business of transformation. He wants to help you become what you were intended to be. He has an incredible plan for your life – a destiny that only he can bring about. But he’s not going to force it. He has chosen in his grace not to force Himself on you. But when you’re ready, He’s there. He’s there to forgive. He’s there to restore and redeem your brokenness. He’s there to celebrate with you – a new and abundant life.

Folks, I hope you stick with me all the way through this series. I hope that you’ll consider getting in a small group or forming a small group in your home, as we make those materials available to you and as we encounter the Jesus of the Bible, not my Jesus or your Jesus. The Jesus who really came into this world for you. Let’s go to Him now in prayer:

Lord Jesus, I thank You for the incredible Grace you offer when You stoop to help me even though I’ve constantly run from you, gone my own way and done my own thing. Lord, humbly, shakily, I’m returning. But I don’t have the strength to make that turn on my own. I pray that You will take over. Remove from me every character defect that stands in the way of my usefulness to You. Forgive me, and help me to rejoice with the angels in heaven as You truly become the Lord of my life. Amen.

“Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” (John 21:25 NIV)