

Call to Obedience #500
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First Words

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First words are important. They get our attention. We remember the first words of a baby or a sweetheart. But as the first words of men are important to us, so much more should we treasure the first words that God has given to us. God will speak to each one of us individually and His words to us will be different than His words spoken to anyone else. Let us take a look.

God's first words to Adam were: *Be fruitful and multiply* (Gen. 1:22). God's first words to Abram were: *Get out of your country* (Gen. 12:1). God's first words to Moses were: *Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet* (Ex. 3:5). God's first words to Peter were: *Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men* (Mark 1:17). God's first words to Paul were: *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?* (Acts 9:4). God's first words to me when I was in a forest in Germany were: *I love you. I love you. I AM Love.*

God's first words must be taken seriously because they are very sacred. But although God speaks to each one of us individually, He also at times speaks to us collectively to address our common needs. With this in mind, we should look at God's first words in both the Old and New Testament. The Bible begins with: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (Gen. 1:1). The first thing that God wants us to know is that He is the source of everything. The entire Bible is built on the fact that God was first, that God is still first and He ought to be first in all of our decisions, considerations and purposes. Since God is the beginning point of the whole universe, He is certainly capable of being the beginning point to make a new life out of an old life, a whole life out of a broken life and a holy life out of a shameful life.

After the fall of man in the Old Testament, the Bible shows us how God wants to be with us and can be with us again. Now let us fast forward 4,000 years to the time when God gave us another book, the New Testament. The New Testament shows us beautifully that through Jesus, God can actually dwell within us. And there is a world of difference between "with us" and "in us!" For this to happen, Jesus died for our sins, rose from the dead, returned to heaven and sent the Holy Spirit into our penitent hearts in order that all

which was in Him might enter into us. That is what the New Testament is all about.

Repentance: The Gate to the Kingdom of God.

The next question then is: “What were the first words that God used to open the New Testament era?” The answer is loud and clear from the gospel of Mark: **Repent** (Mark 1:15). Yes, the New Testament does not begin with Matthew’s account of the Christmas story, the baby Jesus story or a long genealogy. The New Testament begins with Mark’s account giving us the picture of John the Baptist preaching the baptism of repentance. The two main reasons why we know that Mark was the first to write a gospel are:

1. He says so: *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God* (Mark 1:1).

2. History tells us that Matthew did not write his gospel until 15 years after the book of Mark was written. In fact both, Matthew and Luke drew heavily from the gospel of Mark to write their Gospels.

The call to repentance receives first place in bringing man to God so that God can take up residence in him and he can then regain the likeness and image of his Maker which was lost through Adam’s sin. So, in Genesis 1, we have the definition of God’s nature and in Mark 1, we have the definition of man’s need. Yes, if we put God’s nature and man’s need together, we have the heart of the Bible—the rest is commentary.

Further, we must take note that Mark’s gospel is also Peter’s gospel. Mark was commissioned by Peter to write this gospel. Mark was only a teenager during Christ’s ministry, but Peter was the first disciple whom Jesus called to follow Him. And Jesus gave him the keys to the kingdom of heaven. With these keys, Peter opened both the gospel age and the Pentecostal age with the call to repentance. With Moses having had the key to the Old Testament and Peter to the New Testament, can we imagine the excitement when these two mighty men came together with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? It is a picture of the written word and the living Word assembled in one place surrounded with and by the glory of heaven. So then, God’s first call in the gospel age is to repentance. He wants all men, everywhere, to repent so that the King of Glory may come into their lives. Now here is the second picture that God wants us to get through Mark.

Peace Through Conflict.

Yes, the sweet little baby Jesus is not to be found on the first page of God’s gospel history book which is the book of Mark. Do not get me wrong. I

like the baby Jesus, but for everyday living, I really need Him in His full manhood, in His Lordship over me. Hence, Mark gives the first appearance of Jesus as follows: *It came to pass in those days that Jesus... was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him... Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan...* (Mark 1:9-13). The first picture that Mark gives us of Jesus is that of a warrior! He was “driven” into the wilderness to make war with the devil. After 40 days of this trial, the devil departed from Him for a season, exhausted. But Jesus went forth in the power of the Holy Spirit, not exhausted.

And yes, Jesus’ conflict with the devil brought Him also into conflict with His family, His church people in Nazareth, the Temple institution, the scribes and Pharisees; and finally the multitude had exceeding anger towards Him and they put Him to death. Yes, as it was with Him, so it will be with you because His whole life was a protest against conformity (Rom. 12:2). Yet, the honest of heart, the brokenhearted and the weary found wholeness, harmony, healing, hope and a song in Him that drew them into the kingdom of heaven. But the bottom line is that once we join Jesus, we will never be off the battlefield. Therefore, the day we are born of God, God does not give us a toy or a candy sucker, but rather, on the day we are born into His kingdom, He gives us a sword, shield and armor made in heaven and delivered to our doorsteps. So here in Mark, first we have repentance, next we have conflict. If we are not in conflict, we are likely dead.

Getting to the third picture that Mark gives us, we see Jesus inviting humankind in His battle against evil to become His disciples. Here it is.

The Call to Discipleship.

And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea... Then Jesus said to them, Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men. They immediately left their nets and followed Him (Mark 1:16-18). Here is the first description of discipleship in the history of the Church given by Mark. Soon thereafter, Jesus gives us a definition of discipleship as follows: *If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me* (Luke 9:23). Please note that Mark wrote his words for Peter, about 40 years after Jesus had ascended to His Father. By that time, thousands of Christians had been martyred under Emperor Nero. They had already proved that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

Mark was a master at simplicity and shows us that there are just two components to discipleship: leaving and following. We can do both of these in the moment of the twinkling of an eye. From then on, we become His and His alone. From that point on, it is always: *...Lord, what do You want me to do?* (Acts 9:6); or *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life* (John 6:68). From that point on, nothing in life makes sense anymore except to follow Jesus.

I see thousands of believers engaging in Bible studies on discipleship and reading dozens of books on the subject. But the years continue to go by and we still fall short of following because we think discipleship is a work in process. So, we take our time at it, going at it little by little. No, my friend, becoming a disciple is not portrayed here as a process but as a crisis, a reformation, a revolution and the death of the old man rolled into one. It is a decisive moment in which we must make a 180° turn. This is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: “When Jesus calls a man, He bids him die.” When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, He did not wait to send them out into the streets to witness until after they finished His 3-year course in discipleship training. No, He sent them out immediately, as sheep among wolves. For it is not in the training, but it is through the dying, the perpetual dying of the disciple, that the power of God brings conviction through our lives to the sinner.

First words are important. So, what the Bible is all about is that God first identifies Himself as the creator of all things (Gen. 1:1) and then He invites us to join Him through repentance and discipleship to win the lost and become His everlasting bride. Again, the rest of the Bible is commentary.

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