

Coming into the Way

Luke 14:26

²⁶ *“If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.*

It is clear that the Lord Jesus calls us to follow after Him. And yet when he first began to preach in Judea we are told in the Gospel accounts that his message was, *“Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* Christ appeared at first to be calling people to a new order of things; A new government over life; a new way of living; a government in which God would rule and direct behavior and activities. And He was. **A kingdom is made up of a king, of subjects, and of the laws and rules of that king.** You may recall that early on in his ministry, the Lord took time to outline the law of this new government in a message we call the Sermon on the Mount. There he delineated to the people the attitudes God was looking for in his Kingdom and the extent to which God was pressing His law upon the people. He said things like, *“Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”* *“You have heard it said you shall not murder...But I say whoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of judgment and whoever says, ‘fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”* *“You have heard it said you shall not commit adultery but I say whoever looks at a woman with lust has committed adultery in his heart.”* *“Don’t swear by anything but let your yes be yes and your no be no.”* *“turn the other cheek, go the extra mile.”* *“love your enemies and pray for those who spitefully use you.”* *“Be perfect as your father in heaven is perfect.”* **The way of God in the universe is a moral way.** It is a way of thinking and of acting. It places a new order on your life and re-establishes the way you relate to others. Under this law you are *to love God with all that you are and you are to love all others as you love yourself.* **That is the law of heaven... the order of the kingdom.** When Jesus came He called people to come to turn to this new order, this new moral governance. It was a call into a kingdom.

Now the church and the Christian is to be a reflection of this kingdom and when there is a certain mass of movement of individuals and dynamic church life into this kingdom expression then the church reaches a tipping point in which it impacts the culture in which it lives. Oz Guinness, Christian author and social analyst has noted that **when the church is revived and reformed by the ways of the Kingdom then the culture that the church is in experiences a renaissance, a culture uplift.** Today our culture is moldy and stale and morally waning. **The reason above all else for the demise of Western culture’s vitality is that the church in that culture is too much of that culture.** The church is to be *in the world* but not *of it*. Unfortunately in an undiscerning desire to grow, over the last 40 years the church has become both **in** and **of the world**. It is of the world to such an extent that it has little to offer western culture in order to rescue it from its own worst elements. What is needed is a church that gets back to the way of this Kingdom. Guinness in a recent interview states, *“We are living in a cut-flower civilization, the flowers are dying on all sides, and only the Way of Jesus in the world of today will make the difference that we long for.”*¹

When Jesus first began to preach he preached this way of the Kingdom, this order of living.

¹ Oz Guinness in Christian Post interview on how Christianity has changed the world and still can

But after a while the message of the Lord Jesus took on a new emphasis. At its heart it didn't change but it was expressed over the time of his earthly ministry with a fuller meaning. Eventually, **Instead of calling people to a new order, to a new governance over their lives, to a new way of living... Christ began to sum up the force of his call by calling men and women to Himself.** He said, "come unto me." He said, "follow me." He said, "come after me." He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." This was the surprise summation of the call to repent and come to a new Kingdom. **CHRIST WAS THE KINGDOM. He was the new order of life. He was the new way of living. He was the righteousness that exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees. He was. And the way into the Way of Jesus will mean making Him central and all.**

We rightly say that Christ calls us into a relationship and not a religion. **If religion is just external forms and functions that we follow to satisfy God then we are not called to religion. But we are called to the Lord Jesus and he is to be our religion. Because when He comes into our lives he brings an order and direction to our lives. He fulfills everything that must exist in His Kingdom in Himself. He is the King. He dwells in His subjects. And He lives out His laws from within them.** He communicates to us a will and a walk... The Way of His own life within us. And so as Jesus becomes everything within us, his way of living becomes everything to us.

He becomes the center and source of all our living...our being and our doing are His life in us. This is the mystery of the Gospel. Paul said it is, "*Christ in me the hope of glory.*"

- The revival that the church needs is a re-animation of the life of Christ within us.
- The reformation the church needs is for this Christ to come with the Sword of the Word of God from His mouth to expose our sins, the fire of the Holy Spirit to judge our sins, the Iron rod of the Shepherd to govern us and keep us from sin.

Now when Christ's ministry first transpired and He simply preached of an order for living, of a Kingdom, there were many people who responded to the message to repent and get ready for the new Kingdom... the new order of living. This was a message that said to them, *all the markers for living are changing and you need to follow this new way of living. It is more exacting than you thought so tighten up your laces and get ready to go on the march of this new way.* The people responded in large numbers. **But** when the Lord Jesus began to clarify his message or to distill it over time, so that it all boiled down to this, "*The Markers are leading you to me. Follow me. Find your life in me. Find your new way of living by letting me put my life in you and live my life from you. Deny yourself and follow me. Consume me and partake of me as your very life,*" **well they were ready to rally round new markers but they were not ready to let Christ be the center—that the markers were leading them too.** And so the large crowds began to dwindle, and many departed from him in that day.

Isn't it interesting that human nature gravitates towards laws and rules and patterns of behavior but it stops and retreats from Christ? We will accept any level of markers along our path as long as we can avoid making Christ the center of our lives. WE will even go a ways with him but we repel from accepting that He is The Way. **I think it has to do with a tenacious, determined commitment to self... a self that cannot exist when Christ is the center... the way.**

Now the question is “*how do we come into this way?*” And having come to it, “*how do we remain in it?*” Your civilization needs you to be in this Way... you to be renewed in this Kingdom life. It is your duty as salt and light to the rotting and dark age in which you live. It is your contribution to your neighbor and your country to be a part of the tipping of God’s blessing from the church to the culture. You must be a part of the revival and the reformation so that they can benefit from the renaissance. Only this way will do. The help our culture needs will not be found in a politicized faith, it will not be found in performances, it will not be found in public relations or fixing ourselves to populist fads. No we must get back to the Way of Christ. Christ desires for you to live in His way, his glory demands you live in His way... but can we just also say, our nation needs you to live in His way... it is its only hope. So once again... “*how do we come into this way?*” And having come to it, “*how do we remain in it?*” The answer to both questions is the same.

Acts 9:1-22 *Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,² and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.³ As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;⁴ and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”⁵ And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,⁶ but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.”⁷ The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.⁸ Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.⁹ And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.*

¹⁰ *Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am, Lord.”¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying,¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.”¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;¹⁶ for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”¹⁷ So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;¹⁹ and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,²⁰ and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”²¹ All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, “Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”²² But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.*

1st - There must be Contact with Christ – He must confront us with Himself.

Now this is not of your doing. You will never be able to make your way to God. In fact, in and of yourself, in the energies of the flesh, you are always moving from God not towards him. No, this contact must be initiated and completed by God himself. It is a surprising, terrifying, life altering act of Divine judgment and mercy all at once.

In **Acts 9:1-22**, Recall that when Saul was on his way to Damascus that we read, “*The light of heaven flashed around him.*” Christ came to Him and called to him. This is the way it always

is. In **John 6:44** Jesus says, “*No one come to me except my Father draw him.*” The first move is always God’s.

God always makes the first move—and He has. Jesus came... invaded this world to set God forth to us; to make himself known to us. Jesus has now sent the Holy Spirit to impress upon the hearts and minds and consciences of people God’s own presence. **God is pressing in on us even as we speak. Here is the proper response to this reality.**

Application- Pray – We pray “God come! Be here!” But He is... instead pray - “*God open my eyes to see you. God make yourself known to my heart. God reveal to me your glory. Be known to us, not to please us but to purify us.*”

2nd- There will be a crisis when Christ makes contact

Contact with God always results in conflict. Saul came under that light and fell to the ground. He was immediately brought into a crisis or personal dilemma. “*Who? What? Why? Where?*” The words are not asked out loud but they are there. Saul’s world is turned upside down. He immediately is halted from going where he has set to go. Now there are only **blinding questions...** *Who is this? What is this about? Why me? Where now do I go?*

The answers come if you listen... This is the Lord Jesus. It is about your sin. It is because He wants you for Himself. You are to go and do what He tells you.

So another point of **application**, as God makes Himself known to you... Ask the questions and **LISTEN**.

When Christ makes contact he always creates a crisis. A crisis that calls for a repenting.

1st contact... 2nd crisis...

3rd- There is a call to repent

Repentance always means to change our minds. It means to re-establish in us a right way of thinking. It requires we retreat completely from our way and set out once again upon the way. **This is repentance.** We don’t like it. Nobody wants to be a long way into their journey only to hear that they are on the wrong road, going in the wrong direction, to the wrong place. But repentance is hearing that message and turning back upon your path.

Ex. When you first came to saving faith in Jesus Christ, you repented of your way of thinking about your sins and your way of thinking about how you could overcome those sins by self effort.

- You changed your mind/repented from the notion that your sins were a minor impediment that you could remove with a few good deeds, into recognition that your sins were a major block that no one could remove but God alone.
- You changed your mind/repented of your confidence to find your own way to God or to save yourself.
- You changed your mind/repented about Christ. You saw that He had died for your sins and risen again for your life. That he had done all that was required for your salvation. And you stopped trusting yourself and you put all your trust in Him. In other words you repented of the religion that says you must **do** something to be saved from your sins to a

religion that says Christ has **done** everything to pay for your sins. You went from a mind set of “**DO**” to a mind set of “**DONE**.” That was a mind change; that is repentance.

Now that is how you came to Christ the first time in repentance. But the mind edges the wrong way at times. And so we must renew it regularly. **Romans 12:2** *be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind***. We must reassert that change of mind. **In God’s presence we must let Him confront us, a new, with our own self trusting, self oriented ways. We must re-open ourselves to the crisis that turns from self to Christ. And we must repent again... of sin, of self confidence, we must assert, afresh, a mind change about everything we have in Christ and everything Christ is to be to us. Repent!**

Application: If you are praying and not getting anything from it. *God I want a life centered in your Son. I want to walk in the filling of your Spirit. I want to reach higher planes of spiritual life and moral power.* And it is not happening.

- Ask God to reveal Himself to you.
- Be completely ready to risk the crisis of such a confrontation...(it usually doesn’t go down easy).
- Now honestly ask God to show you if there is anything in your life, anywhere, that is displeasing in His sight; and then wait, listen... give God time. If he doesn’t show you anything, then be at ease, but give God time to answer. And if and when He does show you something, be done with it, then and there. This is God’s call to repent. Now... Out loud... renounce that sin and identify with the Lord Jesus.

4th we must put here what happens for that first time believer in Christ... What happens on that initial day of salvation when there was a contact of Christ, a crisis and conflict and then a call of repent... you do this and **then there is a Conversion... a new creature...** There is a new life that begins. **The kingdom of self gives way to the Kingdom of God. Christ invades the heart and seizes it as his everlasting throne. Your center and your circumference change in an instant. Christ is in your heart and in an instant you are before an infinite universe of endless life. This conversion is a conversion to a whole new heredity.** God puts into you his own dna and you are a new creature.

Ex. E.Stanley Jones uses an illustration that mirrors an experience I have had in Nicaragua. He was in a small town in Kentucky preaching in an open square. All the while he was extolling the saving work of Christ the town drunk, fully intoxicated, kept commenting on his message, “That young fellow makes me feel like crying.” He had a long stick that he leaned on to hold himself; to maintain his balance. At the end of the message Jones asked the drunk if he wished to be converted. The man responded, “I’m drunk.” “I know your drunk,” Jones replied, “but God can change you.” “If you say so it must be so.” Was the drunk’s pathetic reply. He bowed his head and prayed a prayer of faith, opened his eyes with wonder and cried, “Why He has saved me and drunk at that.” He immediately pulled a whiskey bottle from his jacket and handed it over saying, “I don’t want that.” And handed the stick over, “And I don’t need this either.” God not only had saved him, he had sobered him up. **Ex.** Mauricio... in Nicaragua....

Application: For the Christian right here... having repented, acknowledge that this was not what you have become. This pathway of the world is a lie of the enemy... You have been remade for a new way; a new life. **I like the idea I read somewhere. Satan comes to the door to tempt and lead you astray. The Christian stops answering the door; Christ is living in**

you. Let him answer the door. When that temptation comes you send Jesus to the door to answer and Satan says, "Sorry wrong house." Folks if you have given you life to the Lord Jesus then He lives in you, you are a new creation and when the enemy tries and succeeds, even, in turning your mind and heart to self and sin... REMEMBER WHOSE YOU ARE AND WHO YOU ARE IN HIM... SEND CHRIST TO THE DOOR OF THAT TEMPTATION NOW... THE ENEMY HAS TO MOVE ON...

Here this is the **5th** step into the Way. Here the application for that person coming into the Way for the first time or that person coming back to the Way to yield before it, renew themselves in it...

5th- Now you are to confess your sin and confess Christ as your Salvation/ The way of Life
The pattern is set in the Christian experience. The first act of obedience they were called to was a very public act of baptism.

Ex. The church has been given this act of baptism... Ananias came to Saul and at that time he was baptized.

- It was a public confession that Saul/Paul knew he needed His sins washed away. You see that it was an open and public confession of his sin.
- He was baptized in the name of Jesus because it was also a public confession that he knew Jesus was to one who takes away all his sins. It was a confession that Christ was **the way** of Salvation.
- It was also a confession of a determined new way of life. He was baptized into the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit because he knew that his life was to be from then on, submerged in, immersed into the life the God. God was to be at the center now... God was to be all in all. And he confessed it to be such. Make that confession to all who need to hear it and make it often.

6th There will now in this way be a lot cultivating... Every new planting needs to be tended and cared for and brought to fullest fruitfulness. And the Lord knows best how to do that. He is going to do weeding and trimming and sometimes he'll send the rains and sometime the heat... That is his work... for you simple faith and trust... He is sovereign and in control.

7th There will be contribution... your life will bear fruit of giving witness to the life of Christ in you.