

Jesus' Preaching

By Rev. G. J. Baan

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Bible Text: Mark 1:14-15
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Reformed Congregations of New Zealand

6 Howard Street
Carterton 5713
New Zealand

Website: www.rcnz.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/rcnz

Congregation, our Scripture reading can be found in the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 1, verses 1 through 15. Mark 1:1-15:15

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; 2 As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. 4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. 5 And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey; 7 And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. 8 I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. 9 And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. 10 And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: 11 And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. 12 And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. 13 And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him. 14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Beloved congregation and dear hearers and all you young people here together in this night in Kalamzaoo, the Lord Jesus stands at the gates of your and my heart and he cries out like in Proverbs 1:20, he utters his voice in the streets like wisdom doeth. "Wisdom crieth without," everywhere where it is to be heard and, "she uttereth her voice in the streets." We all know that the Lord Jesus in the New Testament compares himself to Solomon and he says, "Exceeding Solomon's wisdom, more than Solomon is here." So in

the Old Testament and with purpose he compared himself with Solomon. Solomon also speaks about Christ and, of course, he could have made the comparison between himself and the Lord Jesus. He was only a sinful man. He the king of Jerusalem and in a certain way also a prophet but yet he speaks about him. Actually I say that wrong, God gave his words into his heart and let it flow out of his mouth, as he notes down, "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets." Wisdom, true wisdom, true understanding. Why is that, young people? Well, we can mean and think and maybe hear from other people so why to be so wise? But we are nothing more, you and me, than foolish people. That's actually said to Wigley.

Not foolish only but sinful foolishness fills our hearts. Godless foolishness fills our souls and fills the patterns of our life. We all became foolish people, young boys and girls, older ones, youth, youngsters, after our deep fall in Adam. No, these are not only necessary phrases which I have to say because of but congregation, these are things which are really the truth. The naked truth which is pure reality. We have become totally foolish in the eyes and in the sight of the living God and hopefully also in the eyes and in the sight of ourselves. Oh, that we have to hide our countenance and to say, "O Lord, if thou doesn't go with me into thy judgment, nobody can exist."

How did wisdom come? The wisdom? Solomon doesn't add that word but I may add it, the only wisdom, the highest wisdom. And he stands, I say, in front of you, close by, near you is the word, near you and your heart and he says, "Come unto me." "Oh, I can't," you say. That's true, I hope you really have experienced that and confessed that before God and are convicted about that by God's Holy Spirit and that you will come in all of your bounds and with all your incapacity and all your inability, you will be brought by the living God. You say, "Well, I have to wait then." I won't give you that advice. Most people did and they were lost forever. "I pray as long as I live." Oh, that's good advice but don't think the Lord has to hear and answer our prayers because of our prayers themselves. "What do I have to do then?" Well, repent ye and believe the Gospel and listen to the voice of supreme wisdom.

Mark 1:14-15 and based upon and out of these verses I want to administer the Gospel to you this night. Mark 1:14 and 15. There we read our precious text, of course, all the words of God's word are precious but also impressed as follows. "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled," you could also say "at hand," "and the kingdom of God is at hand," also at hand, fulfilled, at hand, close by, "repent ye, and believe the gospel." Jesus' preaching. First of all, the time of his preaching. "Now after that John was put in prison." Secondly, the place of his preaching, "Jesus came into Galilee." Thirdly, the authority in or of his preaching, "Preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God." Finally, the content of his preaching, verse 15, "Repent ye," as the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, "and believe the Gospel." So Jesus, his preaching, first the time of preaching, the place of preaching, the authority of preaching and the content of preaching. First thoughts we'll do before we sing and then after that the last two. May God give you ears to hear and a heart to understand.

Half a year after John the Baptist started with his ministry, I rather would have to say, had been brought into his ministry by God's hand which is 1-8, Jesus also began. You know, boys and girls, he was exactly six months younger. People in Israel started their minister be it in the Old Testament as a priest or in the New Testament as a preacher, usually at the age of 30 years. The first thing that Jesus did or had to undergo was to be baptized by John, verses 9-11. After that, he was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, verses 12-13. We all know that John immediately indicated Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world." Many people were delivered from the heavy burdens of their sins and judgments eternal. All these things were succeeded by Jesus making his first disciples going with them to the wedding in Cana in Galilee. In the meantime, they celebrated the first Passover that's why we know that Jesus was 3 ½ years or more on earth preaching and doing wonders. He was a little more than 33 years old when he died. Three times at least, three times they commemorated the Passover.

Then we read about Jesus and I take the whole history of the Gospels together and we read about Jesus cleansing the temple or purifying the temple in Jerusalem. We read about in John 3, the story of Nicodemus who came in the night to Jesus. Have you ever done that already? Or do we spend our nights with other things besides sleeping? Young boys and girls, youth, how was your Saturday night? How are our weekly nights? What do we do? Think? Say? Read? Look to? Nicodemus went in the night to Jesus and he was really blessed, most likely the same night already. John 4, the Samaritan woman, she was convicted about her sins and she confessed all her past sins and she was converted. All her sins were forgiven totally. Then what seems a little difficult between verses 13 and 14. So between the last verse before our text and our text is approximately one year. Mark doesn't speak about that. Others do. So after verse 13 and before verse 14 started, it's also separated, "Now after that," so a time has been given. A time indication. Apparently the Holy Spirit found that important not to be silent about these things and in the other Gospels we found those stories but Jesus has preached already one year, mainly in Judea. Now he will start in Galilee. It's just before the second Passover will start and the whole preaching of Jesus the last 2 ½ years approximately almost, is summarized in our text. The fact that we read, "Now after that John was put into prison," we know John preached one and a half years, a little less. So that fits with the explanation I said. At the end of Jesus' second year of preaching, after one full year and some months more, apparently the Holy Spirit found it very important to give the time when Jesus started his preaching in Galilee openly. I said he already preached earlier, he already preached being 12 years old, 18 years ago and he stood in the midst of his teachers and they asked him and he asked and answered them. We read that Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. He was preaching, wasn't he, in the wilderness against and towards the devil. Time and again pointing to the word of God and how mighty and with divine authority did he do that. Actually, he preached in calling his disciples every single time again and how wonderful that was, how encouraging, how comforting. Reaching Cana in Galilee at the wedding by means of his wonders and signs, how much impression it got the people. These beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee and manifested forth his glory and his disciples believed on him. Cleansing the temple, preaching already about the suffering and death. Nicodemus, how teaching, how full of content. Judea, the richer part of Israel, he taught and he preached and he said, "He that

believeth on the Son, he hath everlasting life and he that does not believe in the Son, shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him." How earnest. How serious. The Samaritan woman I mentioned, how well meant, how spacious, how inviting.

So Jesus preached more than one year but I said not openly, particularly to several people in a personal way and now all of a sudden we read, "Now after John the Baptist was put into prison, Jesus came." Wasn't that the word of John the Baptist who said, "He must increase but I must decrease"? And at the time of John the Baptist's head being cut off literally by the sword of King Herod, Jesus wore the crown of his preaching openly. Nothing happens, young people, accidentally or randomly or just because it happens occasionally. But it is especially true in the life of Jesus. He waited with preaching after John was in prison. After he was killed, just before he was killed, he preached we know that by the role of King Herod. Why? In the first place, Jesus showed so clearly and that's a lesson to all of us, especially to God's children, that the same hatred which was in the heart of King Herod and his followers was going to Jesus also. He slew all the children that were in Bethlehem and all the coast thereof from two years old and under, to kill that King of kings. Maybe that hatred is in our hearts also? John put into prison, it places us before the mirror of the truth and the reality that we have forsaken God. We have nothing but hatred and enmity in our hearts towards this King. We have to be instead to be put into prison. Our head has to be cut off from our limbs and from our body. John was put into prison. Isn't it true? Dear boys and girls and young people, that does have a place in the life of grace of each and every one of God's children always that we must go and follow Christ's steps. Sometimes through suffering and through persecutions, many people on earth, through troubles, through sorrows, go into the kingdom of God. Many tribulations, Paul says.

There is also another reason. God's child and God's servant, John, never received that honor which Jesus received. Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. And he knew already at the age of 30 ½ years, we do not have a continuing city here but we seek one to come. After one and a half years preaching openly, and maybe half a year and some months in prison, his great day of glory came, the great day of his deliverance, being happy, being glorified in Christ forever. After John, you take out two words, "after John" and then place for Jesus a wonderful example and what a wonderful sight it is. It depicts also something. In Greek we read with great emphasis the word "after." After in time, not in order only but in time. First the preaching of John was necessary to be crushed, to be made humble, to be made as a low and an empty sinner before God, to be made poor in order that sinners would see the living Christ and the living God, hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of Christ. "After John" and then we add one word, "Jesus." No, I don't say that it always necessarily in the same way exactly but there are patterns which the Lord follows: misery, deliverance, gratitude. Oh, the preaching of John mainly was to crush the hearts, to humble souls as a means in the hands of the Holy Spirit to convict and as a means to let them hunger and thirst after righteousness. After John, Jesus' time of preaching.

How is it now in your hearts, young people? You know some things about the fruits of the preaching of John. The ax is already at the roots of the three he said. I don't know

whether I'm using the proper words but you know the text. The ax of God's judgment at the root of the tree of your life. Every tree that doesn't bring forth good fruit will be hewn out and cast into the fire and that will happen in the life of you, in the life of all of you who are still unconverted and go on that way. All those soldiers and all those Pharisees, white graves, outside holy, inside dirty. All of those people, the whole multitude were warned and rebuked and reproached and also invited, "Come to the Lamb of God." He pointed toward Christ and he spoke about their sins. Again, the question: how is it now in your life, this evening, boys and girls, children in church, older ones, especially young people? Maybe you're sitting on your pew and you're saying, "Well, yeah, John the Baptist, he had good preaching." It may be totally powerless and all the weapons of my self-defense have been smitten out of my hands and I can't do anything but only crying out, "Give me Jesus else I die."

After John, Jesus came. He went there on purpose, deliberately, knowing also what would come. He came into Galilee. No, that's not coincidentally that we read these words, these names, Galilee. What place is that? "The dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation," Isaiah 9:1 and then 2, "The people that are in Galilee that walked in darkness have seen a great light. They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death," that is Galilee. Without lights. Darkness. Without shining light but "shadow of death upon them hath the light shined." Jesus came into a movement to Galilee. John in prison, almost in heaven. Jesus in sinful Galilee.

That brings us to our second thought, the place where Jesus came. If you would have to choose, boys and girls, the place which would be the most efficient one, most easy one to reach more people and then hopefully most effective in having fruit, what place would you have chosen? Here in America? No, not Kalamazoo. Maybe Grand Rapids, more people who go to church. Maybe places where many people live, big cities, New York, wherever. But in the least place, a small town or a place where hardly anybody lives, where rude people live and where much criminality is, like Galilee. What place, again, would you have chosen in biblical times? I am almost sure, boys and girls, your answer would be Jerusalem in Judea with all the pious people there in a good sense and in a bad, shallow sense, with all the piety there good and bad, with all the prophecies which have been spoken there, with all the rich history and the beautiful buildings, with all those famous rulers of Israel, with all those soldiers who went in and went out and tried to keep hold of the people and with all those hundreds of thousands of people already in those times. Jerusalem, also with some children of God to the strengthening of the preaching. It's always a rich encouragement if people of the Lord are in a certain place. No, sometimes he did and he went there and he did miracles and he healed people. He brought to life dead people sometimes in or around Jerusalem but most of his preaching in parables was to be found outside of Jerusalem at exactly the place or the province which name has been given here. Jesus came into Galilee. There, boys and girls and older people and all of us, Jesus spent the most time of his life. There, by the way, it's very important that he did the most wonders and signs there. He gave the most education. Most of the approximately 40 parables have been spoken there and almost all of his disciples came from there.

I do not say that riches and that having a famous position and having been placed in the possibility of having wisdom and a good education and educational background, is any reason for God to pass us by. That could be. Jesus doesn't say without purpose that the rich hardly go into the kingdom of God but it's because our foolish hearts cling to our riches and possessions. So I do not say, boys and girls and young people, that the chance speaking humanly against the word of God, by the way, is more when we are not rich and despised and don't use our talents. Do, please do to your utmost. We have to in studying and working hard and diligently. Never, never be lazy. That does not give the Lord any reason and I'm speaking with reverence, to pass you by if you are working hard. So that doesn't mean that, that's the modern theology, also the modern explanation of our text. Modern commentators say, "Well, you see, they call it the Gospel of society. We have to equalize everything." Of course, we have to help other people but not to equalize. We are not Communists so we don't go with that explanation, of course. Congregation, I sometimes hear it also in our midst and I don't mean only here but in our churches as if that would give the reason to pass us by. We can't make ourselves more pious with selling our house and dwelling in a hut like the Gentiles sometimes thought. But Jesus went to the huts of Galilee.

So in another respect is that if you focus on the Lord Jesus himself, it shows his deep humiliation. All the way down from heaven to Bethlehem, to Judea and finally in the last two years of his life in Galilee mostly. What was that? A despised, mostly consisting of a sort of desert or plain land, arid. A despised, a rude and an underdeveloped province, Galilee. And so Jesus was called after that place, Galilee. A damsel came unto Peter saying, "Thou art also with Jesus of Galilee." And so the disciples were called when the people were amazed and marveled and said to one another, Acts 2, "Behold, are not all these which speak Galilean." You taste the way they despised them, the dishonor in these words.

But now the wonder. Just in Galilee that high priest from heaven, he showed what he had to do, to save that which was lost. That was his mediatorial work, to seek and to find Galileans, sinners in Galilee. To take in and to set himself upon the lowest place just in Galilee. Isn't that the wonder of grace experimentally as a reflection of that for the second point: Jesus' humiliation to the exultation of his children. If he comes over the hills and the mountains of Galilee, then the echo of the bride is, "Oh, here is my beloved and that is now the voice of him who was a Galilean. Behold he cometh, leaping upon the mountains and skipping upon the hills." May I make an application to close our second point? Young people, is it dark in your heart? And do you really desire to receive one spark of light, one beam of light I have to say and one spark of fire in your heart that makes your whole heart to burn? In one second, no, don't expect anything from the darkness in Galilee. Don't say in an automatic conclusion that, "Jesus will also come to me." There is no reason to reason that way. Don't expect anything from your colleagues in Galilee, they can't help you and don't in the least expect anything from yourself being a Galilean. How do you know you're a real Galilean, you say? Are you a bastard son or daughter? Are you adopted out of another country that you were captives? There were prisoners in Galilee also, people they reasoned and they said, "Well, I have been born

again. I am walking. I am living in Galilee. Jesus will come." No, expect all things only from him.

Jesus came into Galilee. Again, how comforting then that heavenly beam which shines from heaven into the dark place of Galilee becoming even darker. Then he gives his Holy Spirit as that spark of light which burns in our hearts and which drives away the shadows. That word is the word of the living God.

Jesus came to Galilee. What did he say? Preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God, he said this, but once the poet said and let us echo that, with reverence in our hearts, "Before Thy people I confess The wonders of Thy righteousness." The Psalms speak also about Christ in prophetic ways. The prophecy of the Old Testament says, "Thou knowest, Lord, that I have made, and it's the echo of God's children,

"Thy great salvation known,
Thy truth and faithfulness displayed,
Thy loving kindness shown.

"Let all who seek to see Thy face
Be glad and joyful in Thy grace;
Let those who Thy salvation love
For evermore proclaim,
O Praise the Lord Who dwells above," but also in Galilee,
"And magnify His Name."

Psalter 112, stanzas one and three.

Jesus at the appropriate time came into Galilee and he didn't do that in vain. Jesus came as the great prophet. Galilee was not too arid, too rude, too underdeveloped or even undeveloped. He came as the Almighty King. Galilee was not too godless to be saved, to be led. He came as the wise high priest. The sins of Galilee were not too big, too much, too many, too strong. He could teach and he did. He could lead and guide and he did. He could save and cleanse and he did because his teaching is more than the teaching of man. His might is almighty and power from heaven. The heavenly, you still remember, the heavenly dynamite, the stuff which people used to even blow up mountains and trees and whatever and dig holes into the ground and make tunnels. He is the Almighty King and he is the faithful and loving high priest, giving himself away until death which was cursed by God. Oh dear young people, why don't you desire then this Jesus or do you? Why don't you need this Jesus or do you by grace? Why don't you cry out to this Jesus, "Remember me, Oh, have mercy upon me, Jesus. I'm in Galilee but thou art there also and cleave to my heart, O dear Son of God." "Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

And how he came with a heavenly message. He came we read, preaching the Gospel. The word "preaching" is a word which is used in a special tense, the participle. That means that he didn't just one time preach, he is always preaching but not only that is expressed.

Also there are some activities at the same time. When Jesus lives, when he goes to Galilee, when he speaks with his disciples, when he thinks about his Father, in all activity, so to say, even sometime during the night, he was preaching. He had been preaching, so to say. I know that is not the correct expression but then you know what I mean. Been preaching and that is what he was doing all the time. The Gospel of the kingdom of God, the glorious message, because the kingdom of God must be extended. That's why you are in church here this night, wherever you come from: New York or Costa Rico or wherever, Canada, America, what state you come from, what place, congregation, even church denomination, maybe not from a church. That's why in this night you're in church, in order that the kingdom of God would be greatly extended and you would be made happy in God, glorying in the living Triune God forever.

Jesus was preaching, what? Of course, Law and Gospel, Adam and Christ, impossibility from our side, impossibility from God's side. Election, reprobation, all these Biblical words and truths are true. They all form, they all shape the building we saw this morning of the doctrine and the true preaching and also the true experience. But now the Holy Spirit leads Mark to use this word "Gospel" and you know if you have been here the last two years or the last year, you may have seen this a couple of times, especially in the parables. In other words, "Gospel" means "the good message or pleasant message in a spiritual way." The good message leading to salvation from God, I have to say, which is undeserved. Good message leading to salvation from God which is undeserved and these four elements are compacted together in the word "Gospel." "All of it comes from my Father," Jesus says. "He contrived the way. He invented the plan of heaven to make sinners truly happy, to have them delivered from their sins. It is a good message that your sins can be and will be and shall be forgiven and every one that cometh to me he shall not be cast out."

Gospel. It speaks about and it leads to salvation. How are you happy the Heidelberg catechism says, truly happy and having your only comfort in life and even in and after death, that I am not lying but the possession of my precious Savior who bought me with his blood assures me with my spirit and who makes everything well in that way that no hair shall fall off my head. He will lead me which is, and that is the last element, undeserved. "Undeserved, O Lord. I am living in Galilee and I don't really know how to get rid of my sins. My bosom sins which I always follow into. All the lusts of my evil heart, whatever it be. All the pride of my life. All my enmity against God. All the hatred in my soul. I go to church because my husband goes or because of my wife or because of my children. I go to church because I don't want to be squeezed with the warnings of other people and devoured under them. I go to church because my conscience has to be quenched. I go to church but I'm not at all receptive to the word and that may be the reason that in my heart is that slumbering, that hardly seeing fire of unbelief and sin and even hatred. I don't know how to get rid of it at all. What about me," you say. The Gospel came from God to you, my dear friend in church, to you my dear hearer, by means of the means we have graciously received and are using later on and in other places. The Gospel came from God and speaks about salvation, happiness for you also. It came from God speaking about salvation and it is undeserved. Truly, you have to acknowledge that: undeserved. Eternal message from the living God coming to this world by means of

Christ, speaking about salvation for you, the greatest of sinners, and then your echo must be, "Indeed, it is undeserved." The Gospel of the kingdom of God.

Kingdom, where King Jesus came, where King Jesus is the ruler over the whole Egypt, we read in the Bible like Joseph was. The kingdom of God. That phrase comes back in the middle of verse 15. "The kingdom of God is at hand." Briefly we'll come back to that in a while but now these words "the kingdom of God." Jesus comes with divine authority to all of us and he says, "Here I am. How can you any longer despise me? Reject me? Go on with your sinful life? Struggling always like we all do in many but cleaving, clinging to your bosom sins or to your unbelief and not give up but maintain your sinful or indifferent or maybe pious modest life. Here I am, the Son of the living God. I do not intend your destruction but I have one desire, that you may live." Oh my friend, I beg you, I beg you, I beg you with the deepest intention of love in my heart to all of you who are in this circle still included, I beg you, let yourself be reconciled with God before it will be forever too late. Then you will see Jesus' resisting hand still with the tokens of love in his hands but resisting, hating all those who resisted him. Then he says, "No, my friend, I don't want you because you didn't want me to be King over you."

Authority which comes from his Father. In the same way, be it sinful and full of all kinds of weaknesses, Paul says, also sometimes wrong intentions, poor in themselves and in their words but yet with the same intention, God's servants come also. Paul says, "We then are ambassadors for Christ as though, as if God did beseech you by us." Now I may say to you, my dear beloved congregation of Kalamazoo and all you who are here together with us, praying in Christ's stead, "Be ye reconciled to God."

It brings us to our last thought, the content of Jesus' preaching. We have almost hit all the aspects of verse 15 but now it is summarized what Jesus preached. Of course, he has used so many words. You can read that especially in the Gospel of Luke and the parables and John in and the last six chapters before the last one, 13 through 18. Many words but in verse 15 we find here a summary, a nutshell, of the preaching of Jesus. Actually, he says four things. He speaks about the time, the time is at hand or fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the Gospel.

The time is fulfilled, that simply means what God promised has been done. The time, I'm quite sure he speaks in these words about time as in relation to the Old Testament and then God of old has many times, numerous times, promised his beloved Son. So Jesus connects the Old and the New Testament together. He joins them. Have you ever heard about conjoined twins? It's serious. They can't have and they can't lead a normal life, they are connected. One part of the body or more: the head, the back, their breasts, middle of the body, hands, arms sometimes and they lack some limbs or have more or sometimes have one heart and so on. They are actually one. Two personalities though always, mostly but dear congregation, when one of those will die, the other can't live on in the same way, of course. The dead parts of the body will infect the healthy ones. Conjoined totally together and what now is quite a negative example speaking about the results of sins will I use, I want to use to make clear to you how conjoined the Old Testament and the new are. It is the conjoined word of God and Jesus, he joins the Old Testament to the New one

and he says, "In uniting them both together, the time is fulfilled." What does that mean? Fulfilled is finished. At the cross of Calvary, he cried out, "It is finished." All these laws of the Old Testament, they still are worthy and valuable, with the exception of the Ten Commandments, they are still in existence of course but all these other words and all these other laws are not to be followed literally anymore as some do also in our midst maybe. Jesus says, "The promise has come. Here I am as the faithful witness, as the truth." That means also John 14:6, the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He said it almost in the same time half a year later, "As the truth, the way and the life." The time is fulfilled and also in this evening, the time is fulfilled, maybe also fulfilled to your heart.

The kingdom, he goes one step further, the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom of God, we saw what that means. Actually, Jesus himself at hand, that means literally, a beautiful expression in English and Dutch the same. In other words, at hand, near, next to your hand. You can grip it. Know that we can grip these ourselves. That isn't what the word "at hand" means. But so close by as if, and I like to think about the prisoner who is behind the bars and he can almost grip that subject which lies before him but not. So in that example, we stand behind the bars. Jesus is so close by the bars of our sin at hand but we can grip. What does a prisoner do then? He will stretch out his or her hands and say, "Please, give me that cup of water?" Or whatever it is. Oh, let our hands be stretched out, which barely seems to be happening. Maybe one says, "Yes, I did. Stretching out my empty hands," and Jesus says the kingdom of God is at hand. So close by. Paul says, "Near to you is the word, in your mouth and in your heart, and it is the word of faith which I preach unto you."

Thirdly, and that's actually the content: repent ye. In our text we see a colon and that means there are some words to be said. Repent ye. It's a call or better to say that Jesus calls upon the people to repentance and to leave the world and to return to God. I literally, noted down in my notes the inability of man does not exclude the Commandments. The inability of man does not, let me change one word, does never exclude the Commandments. Just the instigation, just the stimulation, has us to make to say, "Lord, what will thou have me to do?" like Paul said and to follow up the commandment of Isaiah of old, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord." Same word in Old Testament language, "and he will have mercy upon him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon." Hundreds of times to be exactly sure, to be exact, 165 times in the Scriptures and also with all kinds of variations, the words of our text are used: repent ye or turn, return unto me. The Lord, he uses also a promise. He doesn't only say return to me but he promises, Malachi 3:7, "Return unto me and I will return unto you saith the Lord of hosts." Simply to say that, "If you come to me, I will come to you." You say, "That's Arminian," then the word of God is Arminian. Do you know how the Lord means that? "I am a gracious God. I have never cast out one. I have never stepped over one sinner who returned, who sought the Lord, who repented. I am a willing Savior. I pick them up out of the mire of iniquity and I am going to look for them in the highways and even in the byways of the Galilean cities and I will find them. I am God of mercy."

And believe the Gospel. What is the Gospel? It's the forgiving word that all our sins by Christ's blood are cleansed. You say, "How can I believe that if there is no room and place made in my heart?" That's why Jesus first says, "Repent ye. I will teach you. I will guide you. I am the prophet and at my school I will teach you to need Christ." But he says to all of the people, not only to broken hearts and contrite spirits, "Believe the Gospel." It's in an imperative written here. You have to believe the Gospel. You know that I am not preaching unbalanced, though I think so, I'm sure for myself, but here congregation, I have to say that in a very sharp way here. Jesus says it as commanding as possible and all our excuses must be quenched on our lips. If we are confronted with our inability, sinfulness and godlessness and impossibility to follow up, his words, but he even says it also tonight. Let that make us to be driven into the angles in which we cannot do anything anymore but stretching out our empty hands to the throne of Christ's mercy. He says tonight to you and to me, "And believe the Gospel." Peter has heard these words and later on, 30 to 35 years later he he makes the conclusion that, "He or she that believeth on him shall not be confounded." Amen.