

Jesus' First Message

by Wayne Goff

Reading again the Gospel of Matthew, one is struck with the first message of Jesus once He begins His ministry — **“REPENT!”** (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). Technically, John the Baptist started the message, but he was the forerunner of Jesus, preparing the way for the Lord. Jesus preached the same message at the beginning of His ministry. In the following chapters of Matthew, Jesus tells us the **what** and **how** of repentance.

Repentance means “change,” and Jesus is telling His followers both then and now that if you want to be My disciple, then you **must** change! Change is one of the most difficult, uncomfortable things for men to do. God understands that, but He is offering eternal life to those who are willing to make the necessary changes.

So the **application** for each one of us is to *“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”* (2 Cor. 13:5, KJV). Disciples of Christ — Christians — can be *deceived* into thinking they are following Jesus, when in reality they are not. Error can slip in stealthily and the unobservant might miss it entirely. Keep in mind that we *examine ourselves* in the light of God’s Word, our objective standard. It is not a “feel good” exercise, nor are we dealing with mere “positive thinking.”

How **important** is our willingness to change? George Bernard Shaw once said of change — “Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything.”

How **encompassing** is the need to change? Elders are told to *“take heed to yourselves”* (Acts 20:28), the preacher is told to *“take heed to yourself”* (1 Tim. 4:16), and we are all warned *“let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall”* (1 Cor. 10:12).

How **popular** is the topic of change? It is *extremely unpopular*, to the point that most religious bodies claiming to be “Christian” today preach nothing more than pop psychology to make their listeners comfortable. So . . . how **willing** are you to repent when you need to?

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