

"Bad People Make Good Missionaries"

Mark 1:14-20

29 October 2017

Happy Reformation Day, y'all! Today we celebrate the 500th year anniversary of the Reformation, the day-October 31, 1517- when a quirky, beer-drinking German monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenberg, which helped spark the Reformation. Luther was only 34 years old when he took a hammer and nailed that piece of paper in what he thought was going to be an open dialogue and discussion about grace and indulgences, but it ended up changing the world. And that's what we're celebrating today- the hammering skills of a quirky, beer-drinking monk.

But it's also the weekend of our 2017 Global Outreach Missions Conference! And that's why our sermon is titled "Bad People Make Good Missionaries." That's a true statement. I think Martin Luther would totally agree. Bad people really do make good missionaries, as I heard Jean Larroux say in a sermon once-

"Why is it that when it comes to Christianity we believe that you have to be good, righteous, moral, and upright to talk about Jesus? You see, it's actually sinners who are the most qualified people to talk about the Gospel. It's people who need Jesus who are qualified to talk about Jesus. Listen, when we reverse the paradigm and believe that you have to be good to talk about Jesus what we've missed is the Gospel. And that's why only bad people make good missionaries. When it comes to the redemption of sinners, it just may be that the needy, broken, messy people are uniquely qualified to talk about redemption- not the cleaned up, victorious evangelicals... There's only 2 organizations in the world where you have to be bad to get in. The first is the church and the second is the mafia. You have to be bad to get in. Think about that. We won't let you join, you can't come forward, you can't go to a new members class...you can't join if you're a good person. You can only be part of the kingdom of God if you're desperate and needy."
(<http://www.crpc.org/sermons/sermon/2014-09-28/why-bad-people-make-good-missionaries>)

If that describes you and you believe it wholeheartedly, you're in for a real treat today. Yes, we're still continuing our series in Mark, *Binge-watching Jesus*, but we're also going to be talking about the Reformation and Martin Luther, as well as missions and our desire to see the Gospel spread to the nations and people groups of the world. And the glue that ties all of this together, of course, is Jesus. He's the reason for all of it. This is all about Him and for Him- for His glory.

And here's our big idea today and it's just one word that I'll explain as we go on-
LIAR.

That's our big idea. I hope you can remember it. Liar. This one word can become a very handy weapon to use against your adversary, the Devil. I personally say it to him often and today I'm going to encourage you to do the same. One word to change your life. One word that Jesus used often as He faced temptation in the desert for 40 days. And that's where we left off last week in Mark's gospel. And now, we have new episode to move on to in chapter 1, so let's do that now.

LOOK AT VERSES 14-15...

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Mark begins his next episode and he gives us the timeframe for the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. It happened after Jesus told the devil that he was a "liar" in the wilderness and after John the Baptist was arrested. Mark assumes that we know the story about what happened with John. In Matthew's gospel, he tells us how John spoke out against Herod's brother's marriage and subsequently got put in the slammer. So sometime after John got fingerprinted and got his mug shot taken, Jesus officially began His ministry.

And what was the big idea of Jesus's sermons? The same as his cousin John, the one who just got arrested. Jesus was preaching the Gospel, declaring good news to worn out sinners. He was preaching sermons that declared the good news that the time had come and the kingdom of God was at hand. But what did Jesus mean when he said this? And what is the kingdom of God that Jesus speaks of in verse 11?

Let me say 2 things about the kingdom of God. First, when Jesus says that the kingdom of God is at hand, He is referring to Himself. Jesus was not saying that the coming kingdom was only something that happened far off into the future. Jesus understood it to mean that the present fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies was happening in real time, manifested in His person and work.

But the kingdom of God also has a future component as well. So, the kingdom of God has what scholars refer to as an "already/not yet" aspect. It was already present in the person of Jesus, as He began making all things new, and yet not yet present as we also await the consummation of it in the future, when Jesus finally and fully makes all things new. It's already here, but not yet. So the *fulfillment* is there in the

person of Jesus and yet the *kingdom* is still to come. And the *kingdom* is there in the person of Jesus, and yet the *fulfillment* is still to come.

Second, and I have heard pastor Greg say this numerous times as he has quoted Dallas Willard about what the kingdom of God is: "*It's God reigning...It's where what God wants done gets done.*" Dallas Willard (<http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=150>)

That's the kingdom of God. It's God reigning. So let me ask you: Was God reigning when Jesus called the devil a "liar" in the wilderness when He was tempted? Yes. Was God reigning when John the Baptist was put in handcuffs? Yes. Was God reigning when Jesus began preaching? Yes. Was what God wanted done getting done when Jesus called the devil a "liar" during His wilderness temptations? Yes. Was what God wanted done getting done when John the Baptist had to take a mugshot? Yes. Was what God wanted done getting done when Jesus began preaching? Yes.

Now let me ask you this: Is the kingdom of God here among us today? Yes! The kingdom of God is advancing. It's growing. Why? Because God is reigning and what He wants done in the world, what He wants done in this church is getting done. The kingdom of God is here at Grace because God reigns over this church and what He wants done here among us will get done.

And we'll see all that "God-reigning" stuff and all that "God's will be done" stuff begin to unfold in Mark's gospel pretty early on as Jesus calls his first disciples, as he casts out demons, as he heals Peter's mother-in-law, etc. All that we are going to see Jesus doing in Mark's gospel, you can file under "THE KINGDOM OF GOD."

But how was the kingdom of God manifesting itself through Jesus? Well, one way was through His sermons. His preaching. And when you think of great preachers, I hope the very first person you think of is Jesus! The greatest gospel-centered preacher ever was Jesus! The greatest preacher that ever lived was Jesus!

And Mark tells us that Jesus came preaching good news. Good news about God's kindness and mercy toward sinners. And that's why people flocked to Jesus. Not because He preached messages that were hellfire and brimstone. He emphasized God's love and mercy. Yes, Jesus preached the law. He exposed people as sinners, He spoke of Hell, He spoke of judgment, He preached the law, but the emphasis of His preaching was the Gospel, the good news. And His good news sermons led people to repentance.

So Jesus came preaching the Gospel in Galilee and calling people to repentance and to believe the Gospel. Jesus preached repentance just like John the Baptist. And how does repentance happen? As we saw several weeks ago, God's kindness leads us to repentance, not the other way around. Our repentance does not lead to God's kindness. That's how the Pharisees and religious leaders preached: *Repent, turn from your sin, and God will be kind to you.* That's the kind of preaching that was occurring when John and Jesus appeared. And that's exactly the kind of sermons that Martin Luther heard throughout his life. And that's why Martin Luther was angry at God. Luther was mad at God because all that Luther ever heard was that God was mad at him.

But then Martin Luther experienced an awakening as he read what Romans 1:17 says about the Gospel: "*For in it (the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'*" Luther began to see that righteousness was a free gift offered by God to sinners.

And so, the lights came on for Luther. And he began to understand that what Paul was speaking of in Romans 1 was a righteousness that God in His grace was making available to those who would receive it passively, not those who would achieve it actively. Righteousness was for those who would receive it by faith and by which they could be reconciled to a holy and righteous God. So here's how Luther described his experience as he finally saw that the righteousness revealed in the Gospel according to Romans 1:17 was a free gift and a demonstration of God's kindness to sinners:

*Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of all Scripture showed itself to me. And whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven. (Martin Luther, "Preface to Latin Writings [1545]," in *Luther's Works* 34:336-37; WAusg 54.185-86)*

And this was the moment of awakening for Luther. He said, "You mean, in Romans 1:17 Paul is not talking about the righteousness by which God Himself is righteous, instead he's speaking of a righteousness that God gives freely by His grace to people who don't have any righteousness of their own?" Originally, Luther thought "righteousness" was God's holy character and anger at sin. He was taught that God's

righteousness looked like this: God is righteous and He punishes sinners and the unrighteous. And that made Luther angry with God. But then he began to see that righteousness was a free gift given to undeserving sinners. Luther discovered that the Greek word in Romans 1:17- *dikaios, dikaiosune*- didn't mean to *make righteous*, but rather to *regard* as righteous, to *count* as righteous, to *declare* as righteous. And that's when the lights came on for Luther.

And many people still see God's righteousness the way Luther originally did. It was how the Pharisees presented God: angry, just, ready to strike you down. But the Gospel reveals God's righteousness as a free gift given to sinners. And this is why people clamored to John's preaching and to Jesus' preaching. It's why the crowds in Mark's gospel can't get enough of Jesus. They wanted to know that righteousness could be given as a gift, not earned. Because the Pharisees and religious leaders were telling everyone that they had to earn it; to earn acceptance with God through their behavior. And the religious leaders in Jesus' day smugly thought that they had arrived spiritually and everyone was just trying to keep up. And the same was true in Luther's day.

Right standing with God is a gift that gives to sinners and it can never be earned. That was the heartbeat of John's wilderness preaching, the heartbeat of Jesus' ministry, the heartbeat of the Reformation, and it's the heartbeat of missions today. We want to proclaim the good news that God loves and forgives sinners when they trust in this "alien righteousness" that Jesus secured for us. We want to do missions and support missionaries who tell people that righteousness can be theirs if they simply reach out with the empty hands of faith. We're all about missions here at Grace because we're all about the Gospel here at Grace.

Luther rediscovered the righteousness of God that is free for sinners without any kind of earning. And when Martin Luther nailed those 95 theses to that church door, the Reformation began and then slowly it became a time of the recovery of the true meaning of the grace of God, a recovery of the Gospel, a recovery of the 5 Solas:

Sola Scriptura- *According to Scripture alone.*

Sola Gratia- *Saved by grace alone.*

Sola Fide- *Saved through faith alone.*

Solus Christus- *Saved in Christ alone.*

Soli Deo Gloria- *For the glory of God alone.*

And what Mark tells us Mark 1:14-15 is basically a summary of Luther's 95 theses. Luther's 95 theses are just an explanation of what Jesus was preaching: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* In fact that's how Luther began his 95 theses:

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Matthew 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

The whole Christian life is one of repentance where we are always turning away from sin and turning back to Jesus. That may sound a little bleak, but it's true.

Tim Keller says, *"On the surface this looks a little bleak. Luther seems to be saying Christians will never make much progress in life. That, of course, wasn't Luther's point at all. He was saying that repentance is the way we make progress in the Christian life. Indeed, pervasive, all-of-life repentance is the best sign that we are growing deeply and rapidly into the character of Jesus... In 'religion' the purpose of repentance is basically to keep God happy so he will continue to bless you and answer your prayers...In the gospel... the purpose of repentance is to repeatedly tap into the joy of our union with Christ to weaken our impulse to do anything contrary to God's heart."* ("All of Life is Repentance"
http://download.redeemer.com/pdf/learn/resources/All_of_Life_Is_Repentance-Keller.pdf)

That's what John was preaching and that's what Jesus was preaching. Repent and believe the Gospel. That's what Christians need to do everyday of their lives. What Jesus said in Mark 1:15 is what He is saying to you, right now, on the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and it's this: *Repent and believe the Gospel.* When you wake up every morning, you have one "to do" list: *Repent and believe the Gospel. Turn from your sin and turn back to Jesus.*

And coming in at #62 on Luther's 95 theses was this-

62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

And when the devil tries to get you to believe that God's grace cannot cover your sin, when he tells you that God is still mad at you, when he tells you that you've used up all of God's grace and God won't forgive you, simply tell him one word-

LIAR.

The devil is the father of lies (John 8:44) and the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). He wants you to believe that Jesus *remembers* your sins. He wants you to believe that you are condemned. But he's a liar. The sin that you cannot forget, Jesus cannot remember. Let me say that again because some of you need this reminder at this very moment on Reformation Sunday: *The sin that you cannot forget, Jesus cannot remember.* And if Satan tries to get you to disbelieve that truth, if he tries to get you to not believe that the true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God, then you know what four-letter word to call him.

Speaking of calling someone, the next episode that Mark wants us to binge-watch is the episode where *calls* His first round of disciples to follow Him.

LOOK AT VERSES 16-20...

Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Do you need some good news? This little paragraph is just dripping with encouragement. It reminds us that God picks weak people to extend His kingdom in this world. Jesus could have picked scholars and rabbis who had their Ph.D. in the Old Testament to be His disciples, but He didn't. Why not? Because they had no need of Jesus. They didn't feel their need of Him. But these 4 mean- Peter, Andrew, James, and John- they felt their need. They weren't the brightest people. They were just hard-working fishermen. Blue collar. They didn't have their Ph.D. in Hebrew. They were just a bunch of nobodies. And Jesus chose them to be part of His close-knit friends.

Understand this: Jesus only picks losers who don't measure up according to the world's standards. That's how He gets the glory! He picks people who are desperately dependent on Him. If you can be a "fisher of men," if you can be a missionary without the help of Jesus, He doesn't want you on His team. He only picks "losers" according to the world's standards. He only picks the people who are picked last and then he fills his team up with a bunch of last picks.

It's like the *The Bad News Bears*. Remember that movie? One of my favorites growing up. I think the people who wrote that movie read the Gospels. I think they saw Jesus picking from the bottom of the barrel and assembling a team that was hopeless and then they saw how they turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6), and they thought, "We could do a movie based off this. Jesus seemed to turn bad people into good missionaries. Let's call our new movie "The Bad News Bears.""

Bad people make good missionaries. 3 of the 4 men that Jesus chooses here in Mark 1 go on to make big mistakes: denying Jesus, cursing Jesus, fighting over who gets to sit next to Jesus in the kingdom, etc. These guys were failures. They were bad people who did bad things. And the people who know they are bad are the most qualified to spread the good news to their neighborhoods, city, nation, and the world. People who know they cannot make it without Jesus make the best missionaries.

And Martin Luther knew that he was bad. He knew the depth of his sin. He once said, *"I am more afraid of my own heart than the pope and all his cardinals."* Luther knew that he was the biggest problem in the church. Can you say that today? Can you honestly say, *"The biggest problem with Grace, the biggest problem in this church is me."* If you can come to grips with that, you may be the starting place for a new Reformation here at this church. Something to think about, y'all. Something to think about. If you can admit, *"I am the biggest problem with this church,"* if we all can say that, we might be on the cusp of a new Reformation here that spreads to our city and the nations of the world.

Listen, when the devil tries to tell you that the problem with this church is *somebody else*, tell him-
LIAR.

Tell him, *"You're a liar, Satan. I'm the biggest problem. It starts with me, Devil. It starts with my heart and my attitude about other people. I need to be the chief repeneter in this church and not focus on others and blame them for everything. It starts with me. It starts with my repentance."*

Let me tell ya, that will spark a new Reformation in your home, in your neighborhood, in your workplace, in this church, in this city, in this nation. Jean Larroux said, *"If the biggest sinner you know isn't you, then you don't know yourself very well."*

The disciples that Jesus picked were messed up! You know that. You've read about them in the gospels. But messed up, broken, sinful, weird people are the kind of people that Jesus picks for His team.

Listen, God specializes in using weird, quirky people to extend His kingdom in this world. Please don't think Martin Luther was some clean-cut, normal person. He was strange! Martin Luther was a weirdo. You probably won't hear many pastors say that in their sermons on Reformation Sunday, but I will because Martin Luther was weird! He was not your typical pastor. Let Luther give you hope that God can use anyone to extend His kingdom. Let Luther encourage you that God can use you as a missionary because the guy that Jesus used to help spark the Reformation was a weirdo. Just *Google* some of the weird things that he said.

But even though Luther was a strange one, He knew where all the glory should go: *to God alone*. Luther knew that any part he played in seeing the Reformation come about was all due to grace and therefore all glory should go to Jesus. Concerning the role he played in the Reformation, Luther simply said this-

"Take me, for example. I opposed indulgences and all papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip of Amsdorf the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word did it all. Had I wanted to start trouble.... I could have started such a little game at Worms that even the emperor wouldn't have been safe. But what would it have been? A mug's game. I did nothing: I left it to the Word." (The Second Sermon, March 10, 1522, Monday after Invocavit [Martin Luther, *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, p. 292-294.])

Reading about Luther and reading about the failures of the disciples that Jesus calls here in Mark 1 should give us hope that God uses all kinds of people to see His kingdom come. Jesus uses all kinds of people- weirdos, straight-laced, uptight, beer drinkers, teetotalers, vegans, oddballs, OCD, failures, misfits, socially awkward, vaccinated, unvaccinated, Democrats, Republicans, tattooed, dreadlocks, introverts, extroverts, mayonnaise lovers, mayonnaise haters, people with stomach issues, etc- Jesus uses all kinds of people to get done what He wants done.

And please understand that though I love Martin Luther- especially because he was so quirky- and though I quote him often in my sermons, he's not my savior. Jesus is. Jesus is the one who should be the star of the Reformation. Jesus is the one who should be the focus and the star of this church. Jesus is the one that we should be obsessing over in this church- not someone else and how they offend us or how they bother us or how we don't like them. Jesus is the one who should capture our hearts. Jesus is the one who lived and died and rose for us. He's our Treasure, our delight. He's our obsession.

And Jesus is the one who is the focus of one of Martin Luther's most famous and well-loved hymns: *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. It's a hymn that highlights God's kingdom, that highlights that Jesus reigns above all earthly powers, that highlights that what God wants done gets done.

And in verse 3, Luther talks about the Devil, the one who was busy trying to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. Luther reminds us that Satan's doom is sure:

The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! His doom is sure.
One little word shall fell him.

What is the "one little word" that will undo the devil? I'll tell you what it is- **LIAR.**

Luther himself tells us that this is the word he had in mind when he wrote this hymn. The "one little word" that he had in mind was "liar." When speaking about some of the books written against him, Luther said-

"For all such books, even if there were as many as thousands of them written every day and every hour... (they) are very easily refuted with the single word, 'Devil, you lie,' just as that haughty beggar Dr. Luther sings so proudly and boldly in those words of his hymn, 'One little word shall fell him.'" (Against Hanswurst, AE 41:185-186.

One little word will fell him. One little word will stop the Devil in his tracks- **LIAR.**

So when the devil tries to tell you that God doesn't love you, say this, "Liar!"
When the devil tries to tell you that you can't be an effective missionary, say this, "Liar!"

When the devil tries to tell you that your sins aren't forgiven, say this, "Liar!"
When the devil tries to tell you that bad people make *bad* missionaries, say this, "Liar!"
When the devil tries to tell you that you're a weirdo and God cannot use you in ministry, say this, "Liar!"
When the devil tells you that you could never raise the finances to be a missionary, say this, "Liar!"
When the devil tells you that it's too dangerous to risk going overseas and being a missionary, say this, "Liar!"
When the devil tells you that the pleasures of sin are worth it, say this, "Liar!"

That's the one word that shall fell him. *Liar*. I hope it lives on your lips. I hope you say it often and say it loud. Now, let's stand and we're going to sing *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* and let's sing it so loud that the devil can't get it out of his head. We're going to sing to that Word above all earthly powers, the one who loves us and gave Himself for our sins- Jesus.

"Bad People Make Good Missionaries"

Mark 1:14-20

Sermon Study Questions

1. What is the kingdom of God? Explain the already/not yet aspect of the kingdom of God.
2. Read Romans 1:17. Prior to the Reformation, when Martin Luther read Romans 1:17, how did he interpret the word *righteousness*? After the "lights came on," how did he interpret the word *righteousness*.
3. What lies from Satan do you typically believe? As it relates to missions and seeing the Gospel spread to the nations, what lies from Satan do you typically believe? How about ministry in general?
4. Discuss these quotes from the sermon:

Martin Luther

"I am more afraid of my own heart than the pope and all his cardinals."

"Take me, for example. I opposed indulgences and all papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip of Amsdorf the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word did it all. Had I wanted to start trouble.... I could have started such a little game at Worms that even the emperor wouldn't have been safe. But what would it have been? A mug's game. I did nothing: I left it to the Word."

Jean Larroux

"Why is it that when it comes to Christianity we believe that you have to be good, righteous, moral, and upright to talk about Jesus? You see, it's actually sinners who are the most qualified people to talk about the Gospel. It's people who need Jesus who are qualified to talk about Jesus. Listen, when we reverse the paradigm and believe that you have to be good to talk about Jesus what we've missed is the Gospel. And that's why only bad people make good missionaries. When it comes to the redemption of sinners, it just may be that the needy, broken, messy people are uniquely qualified to talk about redemption- not the cleaned up, victorious evangelicals... There's only 2 organizations in the world where you have to be bad to get in. The first is the church and the second is the mafia. You have to be bad to get in. Think about that. We won't let you join, you can't come forward, you can't go to a new members class...you can't join if you're a good person. You can only be part of the kingdom of God if you're desperate and needy."

Tim Keller

"On the surface this looks a little bleak. Luther seems to be saying Christians will never make much progress in life. That, of course, wasn't Luther's point at all. He was saying that repentance is the way we make progress in the Christian life. Indeed, pervasive, all-of-life repentance is the best sign that we are growing deeply and rapidly into the character of Jesus... In 'religion' the purpose of repentance is basically to keep God happy so he will continue to bless you and answer your prayers...In the gospel... the purpose of repentance is to repeatedly tap into the joy of our union with Christ to weaken our impulse to do anything contrary to God's heart."