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## Summer Family Reunion

### Part 3 – Don't Lose the Plot

Rene Schlaepfer

It is such a privilege to be here. I really feel like Woodland Hills is family now, and I'm so delighted to be part of the teaching team. I just love Ted and Amy so much. Ted is one of the best communicators in the country in my opinion, and I hope you understand how blessed you are to have him week after week. It is so awesome. You are definitely blessed.

I want you to imagine this. Are you ready to take a trip to Washington D.C.? You have been invited. You are on a VIP visit to the White House. Hang on here... We're not going to get political, but you're on a tour. You go through security, and you walk down the hallways of the West Wing. And just before you turn into the Oval Office, you see on the right, hanging on the wall, and it's been hanging there for over a century, it's this very old, framed, engraving from 1864. The president can wait. You're going to lean in and look a little bit more closely and you see that it shows a white soldier, and he is reading, by torchlight, something from a piece of paper that almost looks like a newspaper.

Crowded all around this soldier in this little cabin are black women and men and children. Some of them look absolutely astonished. One is praying. Others are in disbelief. Another throws his hat into the air in jubilation. What is going on in that scene? It's a dramatic moment because they have just learned that everything about their lives has just changed. Here's the story behind that old picture which was made during the civil war by an artist named Henry Herick.

A couple of years before that picture was made, in the fall of 1862, when Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. Now, remember the date – Fall 1862. So, what's the Emancipation Proclamation? That all slaves in the confederate states shall be legally free. And yet, millions of slaves stayed slaves, stayed on the plantations, stayed in chains, some for years. Why? Because their owners kept the existence of this document a secret.

So, the union soldiers are given a new job. And for this one, they need not guns, but simple pieces of paper, copies of the proclamation. They are told they have a new job, one to go, one village at a time, one plantation at a time, one cabin at a time, and proclaim the good news to every slave that you can find. Now, this went on for years and we know the very last soldier to do so. It was Gordan Granger in Galveston Texas, on June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865. About two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, the last enslaved people in America learned that they are free. And they hear about a new regime and new rights and a new reality. Can you imagine...? Just put yourself in their shoes.

Can you imagine hearing this earthshaking news. You wake up one day and you hear that your whole reality is different. Your whole life is different. That event, of course, is remembered on June 19<sup>th</sup> every year. That's what's called Juneteenth, but it's a great story.

I'm not here to talk about that story. I want to use that as an illustration of something just like that that happens in the Gospel of Mark 1, because here, Jesus shows up with his own what you could call emancipation proclamation, announcing a new King, a new regime, a new reality in one tight little power-packed sentence. This morning, very quickly, I want to explore that one sentence. And then give you three quick takeaways. In this one sentence, is packed everything that Jesus was all about. With this one sentence, he kicked it all up. With this one sentence, he changed the world.

This is going to blow your mind. Are you ready for this? Gospel of Mark 1: 14-15. It says, **14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God. 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the gospel."** Let me ask you this. Do you ever feel like a lot of Christians these days have sort of lost the plot, kind of gotten distracted by a lot of things not related to our mission? Ted talked about this a couple of weeks ago. We need to stay focused on our mission as Christians. Don't lose the Plot.

So, what's the plot? What was Jesus Christ's mission from day one? Well, this one sentence has everything you need to know. In fact, forget about one sentence, let's look at three words within that sentence that explain what Jesus is all about. These three words were the three words that Jesus Christ himself used most often to describe his mission. Here's what I love about this. If you are kind of a veteran church goer, like you've been coming to church for decades or maybe you're kind of new to all of this; you're just checking it out. I cannot think of a better sentence to understand Jesus. So, I just want to zero in on just three words for the next few minutes. Here they are – gospel, kingdom, and repent. Jesus loved those words. Just to put it in perspective how much Jesus loved those words, check this out... Jesus used the word salvation ten times, he used the word church 3 times, he used the words Taylor Swift zero times. Jesus uses the word kingdom one hundred times. Jesus uses the word gospel 70 times in the New Testament. He used the word repentance or repent 47 times. For Jesus, these are the big three. So, these are pretty important words if you want to understand what Jesus Christ is all about.

Here's the problem. Honestly, I don't think most Christians really understand what Jesus Christ meant when he said these words. Maybe you do, but maybe there's something you could learn. Let's look at these words right now.

1 gospel – what is the gospel? You might think that's easy in that the first four books of the New Testament are the gospels or accepting Jesus Christ as your personal savior is the gospel, and those are great answers, but when the author of the gospel of Mark... when Mark first used the word *gospel*, the word gospel actually did not have any religious meaning whatsoever. It was not a religious word. In fact, the word gospel was only used at the time by pagan kings and pagan writers and pagan armies. The word *gospel*, in Greek, just means euangelion and that's

also translated good news. And it means really like really good news. Life shaking, history marking news. It means a historical event that introduces a whole new era, a whole new reality like the emancipation proclamation. A couple of examples from Jesus' era. Archeologists unearthed this ancient Roman inscription about the birth and the life of Caesar, and it starts the beginning of the gospel, or euangelion, of Ceasar Agustus. Before people ever heard about the gospel of Jesus Christ, they were reading about the gospel of Ceasar Agustus. That's how the word was used. It just means Ceasar Agustus introduced a whole new era. His life changed the world.

Here's another example. Once, Ancient Greece was invaded by Persia, the Persians enslaved populations of entire cities. But, the Greeks fought back. The Greeks win the war and then they sent their fastest soldiers as heralds, and their mission was to run to all of the enslaved Greek cities to proclaim the euangelion, the good news, which was, "We won! The war is over, and we won! You are no longer slaves; you are free." By the way, do you know what they called these Heralds? They called them Evangelists, because they had good news. Right there you see the difference between Jesus and really every other major religion or teaching. Jesus proclaimed good news. Everybody else gave good advice. Good advice like, "This is what you have to do in order to be a good person or to earn your way to heaven or achieve enlightenment or whatever." But the gospel is news like the Emancipation Proclamation. "This is what has been done for you." And the distinction is really important. Good news feels joyful, right? Because it's not anything you did; it's just like good news about something fantastic that happened.

We just got news that our middle child, our daughter, is expecting our sixth grandchild. That is good news, and we are so joyful about it. Good news is joyful. Advice can feel burdensome, right? How do you usually feel when somebody gives you unsolicited advice? "Hey, pal, let me give you some advice." *Oh boy, here it comes. Not again. Thank you so much,* right?

Listen, so many Christians feel weighed down because suddenly for them, they've changed the gospel from good news to good advice. The message is good news. Something has been accomplished, something is coming.

Good news about what specifically? Well, that's the second word – Kingdom. The kingdom of God is invading, it's infiltrating into our planet. Remember Jesus talks about the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven 100 times. This was like his big message. Now, if Jesus Christ's day, when people hear this they think soldiers and swords, right? When Jesus said these words, for about 90 years, the people had been ruled by the Romans. His people. Here's what that looked like. One scholar said, "Here's what it was like to be under Roman rule: Mass killing, mass enslavement, and destructions of cities was vital to Roman military operations." Commanders in the field used mass violence and brutal strategies upon civilian populations to achieve their political goals as a matter of routine. Atrocity and massacre were academic talk, fundamental modalities. That just means that's the way the Romans rolled all the time.

Can you imagine living under that? That means when Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is here," what did the Jewish people under Roman rule think. They went, "Great, let's kick out the Romans by out massacring them. Where's the army?"

Archeologists have actually found sermons among the dead sea scrolls talking about how when Messiah comes, he will bloodily and brutally kill the Romans. Here's a quote. "On the day, the Romans, fall, there shall be a battle and horrible carnage before the God of Israel; for it is appointed by him as a day of annihilation." That is the kingdom they hoped for. That is the outcome that they prayed for. That's the kingdom that they expected God would one day bring. And then Jesus says things like this: "The kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. Nobody will say, "Look, here it is." Or "There it is." Because the Kingdom of God is within you. This kingdom doesn't have a Calvary or a commander or a castle or a capital.

What's the kingdom of God like? Well, the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed and it grows and becomes a tree. I've had the privilege of being in Israel many times during the spring. It's like the whole country is carpeted with mustard. It's wall to wall yellow carpet all over the country. Now, this is wild mustard. Nobody plants any of these seeds. Nobody tends to them. Nobody waters them. And yet one little seed at a time, they take over the whole country and it changes its whole character. Jesus says, "That's kind of what the Kingdom of God is like.

Or this. The Kingdom of God is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in 60 pounds of flour until it worked all the way through the dough. In other words, it starts small like yeast. You can't see yeast. Yeast is microscopic. And yet, slowly, with no fanfare, no announcement, without any real strategy, it just influences everything. Just yeast being yeast.

Or this. Anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. There's a smallness, an innocence about... Nobody had ever defined Kingdom like this before. Jesus is saying, "It's this, not this." I'm sure if there were political consultants when they said... in those days, they would have said, "Jesus, you're not connecting with your kingdom demographics - Fishermen and zealots" what do you talk about? Flowers and women baking and babies? More parables with swordsmen please." Totally different than what they were expecting. I think it's interesting that right before this Jesus is baptized. And the holy spirit descends on him in the form of a dove. This is the symbol of the power of all mighty God - a dove.

I was thinking about this. Football teams... And I am super into football. Sometimes they use birds as mascots like Falcons or eagles or seahawks. All very scary, right? Or even ducks. And yes, Ducks can be totally scary.

My granddaughter, Emilia, and I were down at the park the other day and we were feeding a duck breadcrumbs. I don't know if this has ever happened to you, but when I stopped feeding

it, it came after us. Of course, there was screaming and there was running and there were tears until finally Emilia looked at me and said, "Grandpa, calm down. It's only a duck." And I was able to handle it." Ducks can be scary, but nobody calls their team the Mighty doves, right? But Jesus later doubled down on this. He said, Yes, you are to be wise as serpents, but harmless as doves. In other words, the world says survival of the fittest. Jesus taught survival of the humblest. Blessed are the meek. The people expected the Messiah to have smarter soldiers and sharper spears than Ceasar. But Jesus says, "You don't understand. We're playing a whole different game. The Kingdoms of this world are about pride and threats and self-promotion. But the Kingdom of Heaven – instead of pride, humility. Instead of threats – bless even your enemies instead of self-protection. Sacrifice. Totally different look and feel.

Here's the thing. This is what Jesus was like. Our King Jesus demonstrated that and now we get to be his ambassadors. Like the Apostle Paul says, "We're ambassadors for Christ." What does that mean? You might know I'm an American and a Swiss citizen. I have dual citizenship because my parents were immigrants, so I've had the occasion to go to the Swiss Consulate up in San Francisco. It looks like a little outpost of Switzerland. Has anybody here ever been to Switzerland? The consulate even has a Swiss railway clock and when you go inside the whole aesthetic is sort of unmistakably Swiss. Its ultra clean, ultra tidy, little trays of chocolates, everybody is wearing a Rolex with a big bell about their neck... just kidding about the bell.

Here's what the Ambassador said, "We want people to see and feel Swissness, to feel the touch. And that's exactly what Embassies do. They show forth what's different, what's unique about their brand, their people, their nation.

We Christians are ambassadors just like these Swiss, so let me ask you, what do people think of when they hear the word Christian these days? Do they automatically think Jesusness? Do they think, *Oh those people reflect the Jesus touch?* I would say sometimes, probably too many times, Christians... and I'm including myself in this. Sometimes Christians have looked exactly like the Kingdoms of this world. I don't really think most who have walked away from the church think Jesus was a fraud or think the gospel is a fraud. I think they suspect we are frauds. I'm not talking about being flawed. Everybody knows that people are flawed, we make mistakes. We are all only human. I mean they look at us and they see people who do not follow our gospel. Whether they believe it or not, they know Jesus was like this. And they know Jesus taught this stuff. They know this is Jesusness and so they look and wonder if it's all true because maybe we don't really believe it because we're not acting like that.

Here's the good news for you and me. Are you tired of the kingdoms of this world? Are you tired of the way they operate? Tired of cutthroat politics, tired of the brutality, tired of the division, tired of the infighting, tired of the insults, the power plays, the lies, the manipulations the preening, self-satisfied, self-promoting rulers, whether they are coming from the left or the right or the up and down or whoever you're thinking of right now.

Jesus says "If you are tired of that, well then do I have an invitation for you." And that's wrapped up in the third word – repent. When you hear the word repent, you might think of the half-crazy street creature carrying around a sigh about the end of the world. It sounds so judgmental. Repent! But have you ever considered what a gift repentance is? Repent means God loves you. Repent means God believes your life can be so much more than your life is right now. Repent is a word of possibility. Repent is actually a word of hope.

Now, in the original Greek it's Metanoia, which literally means a change of mind. Now, the Hebrew or Aramaic word that Jesus probably used is *chuve* which means to come back or turn around. What a gift it is to hear this from Father God. Because we can get the idea of *I've gone too far. If I turn back to god now, I'm just a hypocrite.* But the good news for those of us who have made major mistakes in their lives and that's probably all of us at some point. You are never too far down the road to turn around. The Lord wants you back. He wants you back today. Because if you repent and turn to Jesus, you become part of his eternal kingdom, starting in your heart. And that is the good news.

Now, in the context of this verse, think about this. What is Jesus specifically calling to repent from? And turn toward. Of course, we all need to repent of sin and turn to Jesus as our savior, but I want you to drill down on this, specifically in this context. This is a call for the people to turn from what to what? Well, to turn from the kingdoms of this world and to turn to Jesus as the true King. Jesus is king. Can you say Jesus is *my* king. As Jesus says, "Repent and believe it. Believe in this proclamation. Believe something new has started here on earth. Believe Jesus is the king of kings. Believe that by his death and resurrection, he has won the war, and he has set us free. Because something happens when you believe this, when you really believe it.

Let me just give you one application this year. If you really believe Jesus is the true king, elections can be a lot less stressful because while the president may change every four years, King Jesus doesn't change every four years. King Jesus doesn't change every four hundred years. King Jesus doesn't change every 4,000 years. King Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. That's our king. And if we somehow lose sight of that, then fear and division and polarization and mission slippage poison the church. So, repent from that way of thinking.

We tend to think about repenting in terms of the big bad world out there, right? What the big bad world out there needs is for us Christians... and I'm including myself here again. For us to repent of operating in the ways of the kingdoms of men and not the ways of our kingdom and our king.

Let me be very specific. Believe that what the world needs most from us Christians more than anything else, it's that we simply live out our gospel. This doesn't mean of course that you have to abandon your political convictions, not one of them, but it means we hold to those convictions with humility. It means that when everybody else is losing their ever-loving mind,

we keep our minds. It means when everybody else is hating, we keep loving. When everybody else is fighting, we keep serving. Of course, one of the reasons I love Ted is this is exactly what he keeps preaching here over and over. And this is what woodland hills is doing over and over. This is your reputation in this community.

Now, maybe you look at these three words and you think *this is so theoretical, such big ideas, I don't quite get it*. You're not alone. A lot of Jesus followers didn't get it either. Jesus didn't come explaining, Jesus came proclaiming. He kind of said these things over and over again and left these weighty concepts intriguingly mysterious at first. But people were so intrigued because they just longed for something different.

Most revolutions aren't actually revolutionary. All they do is replace the person at the top, but they use the exact same methods, same armies, same manipulations, same scheming and Machiavellian ideas to get power. And it's not really a revolution, just the nameplates on the office change. Jesus is calling us to really the only actual complete revolution in human history. The kingdom of heaven rather than a kingdom of men. And when we're a part of this,.. Do you know what it's like? You know those super, hot days here in Branson when you're just hoping for some breeze to kick up off of Lake Taney Como? You're just waiting for that cool breeze to come in. When we are like this with people who are so tired of the ways of the kingdoms of this world, we are like a cool breeze. We are radiating Jesusness.

So, how do I do that? How do I live according to the ways of the Kingdom, Let me just close with three suggestions.

I start every day not with bad news, but with God's good news. To radiate Jesusness, you need to soak in Jesusness, not soak in the ways of kingdoms of this world. Soak in his love for you and his grace for you and his sacrifice for you on the cross. There's something different about people who do that. One of the good things for me that came out of the pandemic, is right at the beginning, I met a guy who told me about his habit, and I began incorporating it. I've done it every morning of my life since then, four years now. He said the first thing he did when he woke up, like before he opened his eyes, before he got out of bed, before he did a thing, before he made himself a cup of coffee. He sat there with his eyes closed and from memory, he prayed the Lord's Prayer. He stopped after every phrase to make it personal. *My Father, who...* God's not the CEO of the cosmos, he's my father, the creator of every water molecule, of every leaf on every tree, of every star in the sky says I'm his beloved child. You could meditate on that for a month. Hallowed by your name. Let me bring your name glory. And you get to with every line. Give us today our daily bread. What am I actually praying for today? What's the daily bread I need today? God, I give that to you. God help me receive that today. You just pray through the lines. So, by the time you even get out of bed, you've soaked in Jesusness. So that when people meet you, they don't go, *Oh brother, he's obviously spent a half an hour this morning just looking at something that makes him angry*. No, he spent a half an hour thinking of Jesus.

And then second, stay astonished at what Christ won for you on the cross. Think of the expressions on the faces of those people and that engraving. Never let the good news let the become old news. You're free and not because of anything you have done. It's good news, not good advice. It's because of the war, the victory that has been won for you. So, retain that sense of wonder and astonishment.

3 See yourself as an ambassador of a new kind of kingdom. Literally see your house as an embassy of the Kingdom of God in your neighborhood, where things are different. See your desk as an outpost of the Kingdom of God at work. See your car as an outpost of the kingdom of God on the road. That may be the most difficult one of all, right? But think of yourself as someone who radiates Jesusness. Parent with Jesusness. Be a friend who is Jesus. Work with Jesusness. Manage Jesusly. That's our mission, that's our calling, that's our assignment.

You know the beauty of this. You can be an ambassador if you're ninety and you can be an ambassador if you're nine. You can radiate Jesusness if you're healthy, you can radiate Jesusness if you're sick. You can radiate Jesusness if you're rich, you can radiate Jesusness if you're poor. Nothing can stop you.

A couple of months ago, I was in Japan, speaking at a conference and while there, I met Jeffrey Maki. This is Jeffrey with his amazing parents. Jeffrey was adopted as an infant by his parents in Japan. Jeffrey is severely Autistic. He's almost unable to communicate verbally. That's virtually impossible for him. His hands are usually in kind of a position like this. He never looks at you in the eye. He just looks up and away. He rocks, he bounces. He usually makes only what you might call animal noises and grunts. Consequently, most people, including his parents at first, assume Jeffrey is cognitively impaired.

His parents discovered that the language center of his brain is actually highly functional. They took him to a specialist clinic in Philadelphia that did brain scans and they discovered that it turns out Jeffrey is super genius level at what they call decoding. For example, he is able to learn most languages within months or even weeks without being taught simply by picking up books in those languages. Jeffrey is now fluent in 15 different languages, including ancient Hebrew and Biblical Greek without ever being taught a word.

How do they know this about Jeffrey? They discovered he can communicate with a special keyboard. His fingers just fly across that keyboard. I've watched him. It's remarkable. Jeffrey has even started a blog it's at Jeffrey Maki inc. [blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com).

Why did he start the blog? Jeffrey says he sees himself as an ambassador to the autistic community for Jesus. Let me just read you one of his blogs that he wrote recently.

Earlier this month, our mission in Japan had a retreat. We went to a venue in the Mount Fuji area. Our first session started with great praise music. I could not help dancing. My whole body was involved in praise, however, my tongue could not articulate my praise. The next night as I again worshipped with the music, my tongue got the idea. I was able to sing along some words. This occasionally happens, but not often. It was thrilling. God chose to give me that little taste of Heaven when my whole body will function completely. Wow! That thought encourages me as I come back to the mundane tasks of life. Yes, for me, the best is yet to come.

Then, after the service, a young family talked to my dad and told him how encouraged they were to watch me worship. I was so surprised that my feeble attempts at worship could encourage anyone. And it reminded me to give my five loaves and two fish and let Jesus use them to his glory. Lord, help me focus on you and know you will use even me.

Is that not astounding?

Do you know what Jeffrey is? Jeffrey is a mustard seed. Jeffrey is yeast in dough. Jeffrey is a child. Jeffrey is a dove. Jeffrey is never going to be able run for office or wield a sword or give a speech. And Jesus looks at Jeffrey and says, that's perfect because you are my ambassador for exactly the kind of kingdom that I'm building here. And he looks at you and he says the same thing. If you feel burdened by the way the world works, if you feel enslaved sometimes to the ways of this world and all of its expectations, Jesus Christ's emancipation proclamation has been read to you today. You are liberated. So, what will be your response?

Ah Lord, we give glory and praise to you. Thank you so much that we don't have to live just like the kingdoms of this world. We can live Jesusly. Lord, we want people to see Jesusness when they see us. So, help us to do that, God. And Lord, something they want to say for the very first time – "Jesus, you are my king. I've really never understood the gospel this way. I want you to be my king. I want to be part of your kingdom and not all these other kingdoms that emphasize appearance and ability and manipulation. I want to be in that kingdom. I want you to be my king. So, I receive you as my Savior and King today. Change, Lord, like yeast in bread, like seed in soil, one day at a time.

We pray this in Jesus' name... Amen