

Most of us don't care for interruptions. We don't like them when we're recreating. You're watching a football game and someone rings your doorbell at a key point in the game. You're fishing and a storm rolls in that forces you off the lake. You're at the movies and someone's cell phone rings right in the middle of the movie. And we don't even have to talk about how we feel about being interrupted when we're trying to sleep.

We don't like interruptions when we're trying to get work done either. You get you train of thought going, and you're getting absorbed into the project, making serious headway when someone barges into the office, totally pulling you out of your zone. You're on the phone with a key client when the network goes down and you don't have access to key information that's needed. Or the teacher in the classroom that's got the class really engaged and hanging on every word when the pest control guy walks in and say, "Don't pay any attention to me, I'll be out of here in a moment!" But of course everyone is looking at him.

It's hard to imagine too many scenarios where an interruption is welcome. So I hope the title of today's message doesn't carry too many negative connotations. But the truth from God's Word I'd like us to take home today is this: Jesus calls to you to follow him, is absolutely and always an interruption. We'll take a look how it's an interruption and discover that this particular one is the not just tolerable but essential.

Mark 1:14-20 (NIV84)

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming (preaching) the good news of God.

This verse provides the setting for us. This was still the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. He had been baptized by John. He was tempted in the wilderness. Apparently he preached and taught in Judea for a while alongside John the Baptist. But then John was put in prison, and Jesus headed back to Galilee where he spent much of his ministry. Far from Jerusalem where politics and the official religion was centered, and where politics and religion were intertwined... far from the cultural and intellectual center of Israel, Jesus spent his time in Galilee a place of little influence... a place with merely average people. Throughout history it has usually been that way that the scholars, the influential, the rich... they have shunned Jesus while ordinary folks have welcomed him with joy.

[And what did his preaching consist of? What was the main point of Jesus' sermons?] 15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

[Now, we see examples of how this message and his call to follow interrupted people's lives.] 16

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 At once they left their nets and followed him.

19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

So we're told in Jesus' preaching, he told people: "The kingdom of God is near." I think our first

impression when we read that is that Judgment Day is near. The king is coming in judgment, so repent and believe. While that is true, and while there may be some of that in the term “Kingdom of God”, that is too narrow an understanding of the term.

Let’s look at another passage to give us insight:

Luke 17:20-21 “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

This really isn’t that hard. Let’s put the pieces together. A kingdom is a place where a king rules. At first we might say, “God rules everywhere! So his kingdom is everywhere.” True. However, think this: When does a king cease to be a king? When his subjects no longer accept his rule... when they rebel against him and no longer submit to his authority, he is in effect no longer a king. And the same is true of God’s rule. God wants to be king in our hearts and lives. And he is the rightful king in our hearts and lives. But God does not impose his rule in our hearts. And he has given human beings the right to reject his ruling in their hearts. And many do just that.

But Jesus says, “The kingdom of God is near.” I think there may be a two-fold meaning here. 1) God’s rule through his Son Jesus was near in that it was in the process of being established. He was already living the perfect life necessary to accomplish our salvation. He would go the way of the cross to do final battle with Satan so that his accusations about our sins could no longer stick. Through his victory, Jesus is established as the victor and the king. For the people of Jesus’ day, the kingdom was near. For us, his kingdom has come. 2) But a second way to take this is that the kingdom is close by. It’s not far off. It’s not “way up there” in the great beyond. The kingdom of God is something in you.

When a person comes to trust that Jesus is the only Savior from sin, Jesus rules in his heart. The kingdom of God has come to that person.

So the very nature of becoming a believer in Christ means we must switch citizenships. We must abandon one kingdom to become a part of another kingdom. In other words, when Christ is ruling in your hearts and the kingdom of God has come to you, then you’re life which had been Christ-less will absolutely be interrupted! But it’s a glorious interruption. A desired interruption. The kingdom of heaven is near.

So how does the kingdom come to you personally? The Scripture we just read mentioned three things. 1) Repent. 2) Believe the good news! 3) Follow Jesus. These three concepts are so tied together it’s really hard to talk about them separately or sequentially. They describe a complete process and the process is impossible without all three. You can’t truly repent and then NOT believe the good news of follow Jesus. You can’t believe the good news and not repent. You can’t follow Jesus unless you are repenting and believing. So let me briefly explain all three, but let’s not separate the three in our minds. And then we’ll see what this looks like in our lives.

- 1) Repent: Literally to change the way you think and act. To turn around. Spiritually speaking you can be facing in only one of two directions: toward God or toward sin. Jesus call is to turn from sin and to turn to him for the forgiveness he offers. Repentance is essentially an interruption to your current path.
- 2) Believe the good news. We see how this cannot be separated form repentance. If you turn from sin to God, only to find out God is scowling and angry because of your sin, you will turn back from God. And so Jesus also calls us to believe the good news. The good news is that you are fully and freely forgiven of all your sins by the blood of Jesus Christ. So when you repent and believe, that means turning from sin and turning to God and trust his unconditional promise that

in Christ Jesus there yours ins are forgiven. Trust that when you turn to God, the face you will see is a great big smiling face. A satisfied face. An adoring face.

- 3) Follow Jesus. To follow him, means to line up behind him and walk after. To follow after Jesus means to submit to him, to yield to him, to imitate him, to say whatever way he goes, I will go.

So here's the thing. Today, friends, Jesus is calling you. And his calling absolutely is an interruption! An interruption of something ultimately bad to enjoy something ultimately incredible.

So can I ask you to just pause here and consider for yourself. What path are you following? Which way are you going? Is there anything in your life that has become for an idol? Is there anything you? What do you love more than God? In other words, where do you need an interruption and a wake up call in your life? You see, I think we often times fall into this false belief that our Christian faith is just something that goes along for the ride with the rest of our life. People see life as a train and on their train is various baggage. I've got my job I've got my family, I've got my recreation time. And I've got this Christian faith thing going on too. It's just another thing I do in addition to many other things. But Jesus calls us to something radically different. He calls us to recognize that following Christ IS life. Following Christ is the train! It's what drives us. It's what carries everything else in our existence.

When Christ calls you to be his follower, it is a complete and total interruption to your entire life, your entire value system, your entire world view. When Jesus called his first disciples, they *gave up* what they were doing and started doing something new and different: namely, following Jesus. When Jesus is your king, nothing else rules your heart and life anymore.

So what is it that is might be standing in the way of your following of Christ? What do you continue to follow instead of Christ? This can be tough to answer. Maybe these question will help: **What, if you failed or lost it, would cause you to feel that you did not even want to live? What gives you your sense of self worth? What is your greatest fear?** When the recession began a few years ago, there were some very rich people who lost vast fortunes. It wasn't as bad as in the Great Depression, but some lost their wealth and their prestige. And there were some high-profile names that committed suicide when their wealth was gone. Money was what gave them self worth and losing it was their greatest fear.

Some people are like this when it comes to their families. Family is a good, but when we turn family into an ultimate, we have made it god.

For some people, beauty has become their god. When they lose it or begin to lose it they go to great pains and expense to keep it through surgeries.

Some people crave power. The more they have, the more their self-worth rises. If their power is taken, they believe their reason for living is also gone.

So what is it in your life that is hindering your following of Jesus? Or more accurately, what are you following instead of Jesus? Jesus is calling you today. And he's not saying to you, "Add me to the list of other things you enjoy following!" He's saying, Change entirely the way you think and act. Abandon the train you are on and instead follow me. Repent. Believe the good news. Follow me."

And here's the amazing thing. The Lord Jesus Christ who through is Word calls you go follow him through that same word empowers you to follow him! So Jesus says, "Listen to me! Those false gods you're following are no gods at all. They only consume. They eat up your time, your energy, your attention and they don't give back. Follow me! I do not consume, I only give. Follow me and know that my perfect life I credit to you! Follow me and know that my death on the cross is the full, complete

payment for every last one of your sins. Follow me and you are forgiven. Follow me and you have eternal life. Follow me and you will know God's truth about you and about everything. Follow me and you will know true happiness. True peace. True joy. Follow me, and you will never be disappointed, and you will never be lacking anything that truly matters.

Now this message today is hitting all of you differently. Some of you already are followers of Jesus, and this message has strengthened you in your faith. There may be some here, though, who maybe have fully realized that they've been following false gods. If that's the case, Jesus doesn't want to be added to that list of gods. He calls you to do a 180. To recognize the path you're on and change. Repent. Believe the good news that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Abandon all else. Throw overboard everything that hinders or distracts. And follow Jesus. He is calling. And you will be happy to pardon the interruption. Because Jesus is the only one who sets you right with the Creator of the Universe and grants life forever in unending happiness. I know you will pardon the interruption, for Jesus is calling. Follow him! Amen.