

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” says the Lord Jesus.
(Matthew 4: 15)

There is a common statement often made about Jesus of Nazareth about how He would be embracing the newest ways of living and lifestyle popular in our culture today. The thinking is that Jesus challenged the “way of thinking” in Israel in the first century and that He would do the same today if He were alive in America twenty years into the twenty-first century. But after closer scrutiny I am not so sure. First of all, the basic message of Jesus, like that of John the Baptist, was a call to repentance. A call to change our ways. Our ways of thinking and our ways of acting. That does not sound like any wholehearted embrace of the culture of his day and I don’t believe that Jesus would be any different today. I believe He would call us all to repent of our sinful ways in the twenty-first century too.

Jesus challenged the corrupt leaders of his day both in the world of the religion of Judaism and in the world of the Roman Empire. I believe that the predominant moral positions of our world would be challenged by Christ head on. Our moral norms are no longer being applied. It is not uncommon to hear things claimed as true that have been made up out of nothing and presented as the truth. Jesus is the Truth. He knows deception when he hears it or sees it. He was tempted but He resisted the temptations. Too often today we have been tempted, wanted to give in to the temptation but without being accused of wrongdoing, and so we simply reframe what we want to do as a good thing, no longer sin.

That was easy. Except. Except it leads nowhere. It certainly does not lead to our happiness or our peace. It only leads to more excess, more messiness in our lives, more brokenness, more wounds and a lot more pain. Of all kinds. When Jesus calls us to repent He is calling us to believe in the good news He brought. It includes all the original Ten Commandments as a basic foundation and it is open ended in that it calls us to love our God with everything we have and are. And to love our neighbors, all our neighbors—like we love ourselves. The basic question for each of us is this: Am I expecting Jesus to endorse the life I am living? Or do I expect the Lord to challenge the life I am living? Repent? Or, “Dang, Lord, I am good!” Which is it? That is the question of the week.