**Turn the Page – Week 9 – Apprehension to Anticipation**

**Message Big Idea:** Turn the page by allowing the words of Jesus to transform my life.

**Scripture**: Luke 1:26-38, Luke 1:46-55, Hebrews 1:1-2, John 1:1-3, John 1:14, John 7:37-46

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**Introduction: Words that Changed Your Life**

*(Series Graphic)* Words are powerful, aren’t they? We all know words can either do great good or great harm. There are words that alter the direction of our very existence. For example, here are some of the words that have impacted my life…

* **Stuffed Crust Pizza.** There is a lot of great pizza around here, but when I hear the words “stuffed crust,” my mouth immediately begins to water.
* Or how about **Nintendo Entertainment System.** When I was in grade school and I heard those words spoken…as in “I was getting a Nintendo Entertainment System”…my life was forever changed!
* Or how about the best words of all: **Cubs Win!** I mean, who doesn't remember exactly what they were doing at 11:47PM on November 2, 2016? Hearing those words still gives me goose bumps! Who’s with me? Let’s just leave those words up there for a bit…

Most of us can probably think of words that changed our lives in a small way, but there are words that also impact us in really meaningful ways.

Personally, I remember back to the difficult days of my senior year of high school. I remember feeling the tension and the stress of trying to answer the question we all had to face: **“What’s next?”**

As I was wrestling that question, I remember my dad pulling me aside one day. I think he could sense my frustration and confusion about what direction I wanted to go with my life. He simply said, *“Whatever you feel God is calling you toward, you need to run after that with everything you got.”* And while that didn’t answer the question of what college I should attend, what future job I should pursue, or what spouse I should choose - those words stayed with me. They helped me course-correct when I was feeling lost. They helped bring me peace when I was anxious. Those words weren’t just meaningful to me - they actually transformed my life.

Today, I want to share with you the two most powerful words any of us will ever hear. Words even more powerful than, “Cubs win!” because these two words are guaranteed to continually transform your entire life. I know they do mine.

**Series Recap**

*(Series Graphic)* Before we get to those two words, I want to remind you where we are in our series called **“Turn the Page.”** Over the last 8 weeks, we’ve journeyed through the Bible following the fascinating story of God and his people.

In fact, we’ve made it all the way through the Old Testament and then, last week, we turned the page and came to the first four books of the New Testament called, “The Gospels.” Let’s take a closer look at what we find in this massively important section of the Bible.

**Video: Overview of the Gospels**

**Mary, Transformed by a “Word”**

In the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell us the story of God coming into our world. As this story starts, we are introduced to a young girl named Mary.

As we turn the page to the first chapter of Luke’s Gospel, here’s what Luke tells us about Mary: *(Luke 1:26-27)*

* First, an angel named Gabriel visits Mary, who’s probably 12 or 13 years old at the time, and initiates a critically important conversation with her.
* Next, Mary is engaged to be married to a man named Joseph. In our modern culture, she’d be way too young to be married; but in the first century culture, it was normal for a girl to be engaged so young.
* Finally, it’s critical to the story that we note that Mary was a virgin.

Luke describes the unfolding scene this way:

**“The angel went to her and said, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.’ Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.” -Luke 1:28-29**

I don’t know about you, but if an angel started talking to me out of the blue, I’d be troubled too. Mary is super apprehensive, and who can blame her? As a young Jewish girl, she’d likely heard stories about angels. She knew if an angel came to talk, it wasn't just to say “hi” or to chat about the weather. No, there was some kind of “word from God” coming…some kind of plan. And God’s plans were usually bigger than what people were expecting. Certainly Mary wasn’t expecting this:

**“But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.’” -Luke 1:30-33**

Try to put yourself in Mary’s shoes for a moment and imagine the absurdity of those words. *(Luke 1:34)* She doesn’t see how this is possible. After all, to have a baby… you have to…well…you probably know where I’m going with this.

*(Luke 1:35)* But the angel assures her that she will indeed become pregnant and the child in her womb will be called “the Son of God.” As Mary stands there in stunned bewilderment wondering how any of this can come to be, the angel says something I think we often overlook in this passage. He says:

**“For no word from God will ever fail.” -Luke 1:37**

No word from God will ever fail. If God says it, it’s so. If God speaks it, it will come to be.

The stakes for Mary in this moment were huge. She knew there was absolutely no place in her society. Realistically, Mary knew that to be unmarried and pregnant could very well cost her life. But instead of recoiling at these life-transforming words, Mary responds:

**“’I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her.” -Luke 1:38**

“May your word to me be fulfilled.” I love the humility and trust Mary demonstrates in her response to this word from God. *(Luke 1:46-49)* In fact, as we continue in Luke’s Gospel, we find that the confused and frightened young woman we met at the beginning of the story is now rejoicing and worshipping God for the word she received. Her apprehension turns into excited anticipation as she begins to see how this word from God will transform her life!

**“The Word of God”**

Words can transform our lives…especially words from God. This notion of **“The Word of God”** is an exceedingly important concept all throughout Scripture, not just in this one specific story. In fact, the word of God is a continuous theme woven throughout the entire Bible.

* *(Genesis 1:3)* All the way back in the beginning, God speaks and through his words, the world comes into existence.
* *(Hebrews 1:1)* All throughout the Old Testament, God spoke to his people through the prophets, giving specific words at various times and in various ways.
* And when we turn the page to the New Testament, God begins to speak to us in a new way, through the single most important character in this entire story. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way:

**“But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.” -Hebrews 1:2**

God came to earth in the person of Jesus, the Son, and spoke words directly into our lives. When we read the Gospels, we see that there were a lot of things that drew people to Jesus… his miracles, his compassion, his love. But one of the things that drew people to Jesus was the uniqueness and power of his words. He said things that no one had ever said before. He taught things in a way that no one had ever taught before.

* His words were authoritative and powerful.
* His words were countercultural and at times even shocking.
* His words were impactful and life-giving

Jesus’ words were so effective that even guards who had been sent by the religious leaders to arrest him came back empty handed saying:

**“’We have never heard anyone speak like this!’ the guards responded.” -John 7:46 NLT**

Did you catch that? Even the hired guns of Jesus’ opposition recognized there was something undeniably different about this man’s words.Jesus’ words had a kind of life transforming power to everyone who heard them.

**Jesus Still Speaks Today**

And here’s the amazing thing – Jesus still speaks today. His words are just as powerful today as they were 2000 years ago. In fact, one of the reasons the Gospels are so important is that they contain, not merely ideas *about* Jesus but the very words *of* Jesus. Yet, my guess is that I’m not alone in saying that, sometimes I react to the words of Jesus the same way that Mary first did… with apprehension.

Can anyone relate? Have you ever come across something Jesus said and thought to yourself, “Man… I wish I hadn’t read that one…” I know I’ve been there! Here are just a few things that, at times, I wish Jesus had never said:

## NOT TO WORRY

(“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear … “ Matthew 6:25)

Seriously? Surely Jesus didn’t realize how stressful the holiday season would be when he said these words. It feels almost impossible *not* to worry when I think of my kids, my workload, or that weird sound my car is making. Personally, I feel sometimes Jesus would understand my stress better if He had to sit down with me as I pay bills.

Or how about this one… How many of us with Jesus hadn’t said…

##  THAT I CAN’T LOVE GOD AND MONEY AT THE SAME TIME

(“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” Matthew 6:24)

Truth is, most of us don’t want to talk about money with anyone…especially not Jesus! Yet money plays a big role in our lives. I mean, how much time do we spend thinking about it? Worrying about it? Working for it? Spending it? Saving it? Wasting it?

After all, as the great philosopher Kanye West says, “*Having* money’s not everything; *not having it* is.”

Yet Jesus seems to imply that if we all this focus to money that we’re actually serving it, that it’s become our master, that, in essence, it is our god. I wish he didn’t talk about money.

Here’s another one that always rattles me a little. Jesus doesn’t just invite us, but instructs us:

## TO TAKE SIN SERIOUSLY

(“If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.” Matthew 18:8)

Jesus doesn’t play with sin. He goes as far as to suggest that any part of our body that causes us to sin needs to be removed. Now, of course he’s speaking in hyperbole. He’s using a drastic analogy to make an important point. Jesus is saying, “If there is something between you and God, take it this seriously.” He doesn’t recommend a self-help book or some sort of program. He wants a total amputation of the things that are leading us away from God. Jesus doesn’t seem to think that dealing with sin is a peripheral issue.

He also goes on to say that we are:

## TO LOVE MY NEIGHBORS THE SAME WAY I LOVE MYSELF

(“Love your neighbor as yourself.” Matthew 22:39)

I sometimes wish he hadn’t said that. Jesus has apparently never met some of the neighbors I’ve had over the years. Not just neighbors but people in my community and workplace. A lot of these people are hard to love in general, let alone to love as much as I love myself. Who’s with me? Yet Jesus doesn’t tell us to merely tolerate these people, he commands us to love them. Sometimes I wish he hadn’t said that.

And there are plenty more things Jesus says:

* **To turn the other cheek**
* *(add)* **To love our enemies**
* *(add)* **To set aside time to rest regularly**
* *(add)* **To take up our cross and study him**

Wait… was that last one correct? No – Jesus says:

* *(change)* To take up our cross and **follow** him.

To not merely fill our heads with knowledge *about* Jesus but to *trust* him fully, with our entire lives. To not merely read and study the words of Jesus, but rest fully and completely in them.

Maybe this would be a helpful way to think about it.

*(Genius Idea: Set up hammock on stage)*

Has anyone here had the pleasure of trying to sit in a hammock before? It’s a little unnerving the first couple of times, isn’t it? I’m not proud to admit this – but it took me years to learn how to properly use one of these contraptions.

*(Genius Idea: Struggle with the hammock)*

If you’re like me, I typically spend the first five minutes trying to strategize exactly how I’m going to get into it. I brace myself by holding onto the frame or keeping one leg on the ground – but that almost always backfires. I end up throwing the balance off and looking a little bit like I’m frantically swatting away a swarm of killer bees that aren’t actually there. Can anyone relate?

*(Improved Idea: Video of hammock fails)*

But hammock-experts, if there is such a thing, say that the secret to get into and enjoying a hammock is simply falling back into it – trusting that the hammock can and will support you. So simple, but so difficult to do!

*(Genius Idea: Get completely into hammock and rest for a few seconds)*

I think following Jesus can be a lot like trying to get into a hammock. Often we want to pick and choose his words that we like but ignore the rest, kind of like only putting half of your body in a hammock. But what happens? It’s usually not very pretty! But by surrendering fully to all that Jesus says and does, that’s actually the place of full rest, even when our situation doesn’t feel very restful. Jesus, like the hammock, is not meant to be experienced in a sort of “half in, half out” kind of way. He wants all of us. He wants us to go “all in” with what he says.

Many of Jesus’ words make us apprehensive, yet for those who fully take hold of them, they are absolutely life transforming.

*(Slide with 8 blocks with the words Worry, Money, Sin, Neighbor, Enemy, Cheek, Rest, Cross in them. Highlight words as we say them.)*

* Taking hold of his words about taking *(highlight)* SIN seriously will help us avoid a lot of heartache in life.
* Taking serious his words about turning the other *(highlight)* CHEEK might not feel good in the moment, but it will free our heart from living for revenge.
* Releasing our *(highlight)* WORRY to the God who is never rattled can fill our hearts with peace.
* When we love our *(highlight)* NEIGHBOR as ourselves we might just discover the image of God where we hadn’t noticed it before

Earlier I mentioned I was going to share with you the two most powerful words any of us will ever hear. Do you remember that? These are words that are guaranteed to continually transform your entire life if you grab hold of them. Do you want to know what they are? Anyone interested? Alright, here they are…

**“Jesus said…”**

Jesus said. Those two words are the most powerful, most life-transforming words we could ever encounter. When we truly take hold of them, life will never be the same.

**Challenge: Take Hold of Jesus’ Words**

*(Slide with 8 blocks/words)* So, let me ask you – what word or words of Jesus do you need to take hold of today? What words do you need to not only remember and reflect on, but trust *in*? What words do you need to fall back into and allow them to shape and direct your life like the angel’s words did for Mary?

* **Don’t worry**
* **Don’t worship money**
* **Take sin seriously**
* **Love your neighbor**
* **Love your enemies**
* **Turn the other cheek**
* **Learn to rest**
* **To take up your cross**

What word is sticking out to you? See it as something God might be nudging toward trusting him with today. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct you, to identify the areas where maybe you’ve only been “half in.” Ask Jesus for the strength and courage to trust him and his words.

**Conclusion**

Whatever word or words you choose, maybe Mary’s response to Gabriel could be our prayer as well:

**“May your word to me be fulfilled.” –Luke 1:38**

Fulfilled. Realized. Accomplished. Mary took hold of this word *from* God and her apprehension turned into anticipation. Through her, the Word *of* God, Jesus, came into the world.

This Christmas, as we celebrate the Savior who is born, may we allow the words, **“Jesus said…”** to transform our lives. Even when we doubt, even when we’re full of fear or apprehension, may we trust fully in the one whose word never fails. He is Immanuel, God with us, the one worthy of all our trust and devotion. Let’s anticipate what he might do!

**Communion Idea**

The days leading up to Jesus’ arrest, I imagine the disciples must’ve had a lot of apprehension. If they didn’t then, they certainly did at the crucifixion. But we know that Jesus didn’t stay dead. He didn’t remain in the grave. And even after the resurrection, Jesus’ friends and followers still had reservations. But the future he painted for them led to an anticipation that pierced through all of that.

And at the Table – we don’t simply receive the bread and cup as a remembrance for something Jesus did thousands of years ago - we also step into a new life, a new way of living, with anticipation of all that God wants to do in and through us to help others find their way back to God. That’s what we celebrate together at the communion table.

Ushers, please come forward.