

## THOUGHTS FROM NT WRIGHT

MARK:

If you were to walk down the street of any town or village with any Christian background and were to call out “Repent and believe the gospel,” people would think they knew what you meant: “Give up your sins and become a Christian.” Of course, Jesus wanted people to stop sinning, but *repentance* for him meant two rather different things as well. First, it meant turning away from the social and political agendas they were trusting in, which were driving Israel into a crazy, ruinous war. Second, it meant calling Israel to turn back to a true loyalty to their God. Jesus’ listeners would recognize from the Old Testament prophets that the call to repent is part of the announcement that God’s rescue is close at hand.

MATTHEW

*Read Matthew 4:12-17.* Matthew’s Gospel usually speaks of the “kingdom of heaven”; the other Gospels normally use the phrase “kingdom of God.” Saying *heaven* instead of *God* was a regular Jewish way of avoiding the word *God* out of reverence and respect. Matthew was therefore not talking about the place where God’s people go after their death. It meant, as Jesus’ listeners at the time understood, God’s rule here on earth.

The word *repent* is also open to misunderstanding. Many think it means “feeling bad about yourself.” It means instead “change direction” or “turn around and go the other way.” How you *feel* about it isn’t really the important thing. It’s what you *do* that matters.

The main problem for Israel at the time was that God’s kingdom was not in place. Rome’s was. Israel wanted to get rid of it, and had fought and killed to do so for almost two centuries. Yet as we saw in Jesus’ responses to the temptations in 4:1-11, he rejected power, privilege and glory as a way to advance his agenda.