

Repent

At the conclusion of the message last week, I mentioned that we needed to spend more time on the matter of "Repentance", and I hope to do that today. Why? It's because, as I mentioned last week, too often we as evangelicals get so caught up in trying to get people to simply pray the "sinner's prayer" that we fail to tell them some of the most essential parts of the gospel, the most essential of which is that we, you and I, each one of us, truly is "a sinner in need of a Savior".

And you and I have no ability, in and of ourselves, to even begin to deal with this matter of sin that lives within us. Sin must be dealt with on a whole other level, through an intimate transaction and agreement between our broken and contrite heart and the very Person of the Spirit of Christ.

And for us, it must begin as the Holy Spirit reaches into our hearts and produces within us a strong and compelling unction, convicting us about the sin that lives and lurks within our souls, causing us to want to turn from our wicked ways and to repent of the sin that is corrupting our souls.

Jesus said it best with His words in John chapter 16. He said, "When I go away, ⁷ . . . I will send (a Helper, the Holy Spirit) to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict (you) concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. (John 16:7-8)

And in 2 Corinthians 7, we read,

¹⁰ . . . godly sorrow produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, but worldly grief produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

And in Psalm 51, the Lord tells us through the words of King David as he repented for his sins,

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart . . . (Psalm 51:15-17)

Sadly, it seems that, too often, those who have wronged others are reluctant even to say the simple words, "I'm sorry". They instead, prefer to try to make up for their offense with being extra nice, or giving gifts or favors.

But folks, such behaviors are not God's desired remedies for sin. As these words of Psalm 51 tell us, God's acceptable remedy is "repentance", and "repentance" must begin with a "broken and contrite heart", and then followed with words such as, "I'm sorry", or "please forgive me".

From our scripture text for today, we know that John the Baptist was a Prophet of God who knew exactly what it took to wipe away the effects of sin. And here, as he went out to minister the "call" of God to the people, we can almost hear those demanding words crying out from his lips, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand".

Simply put folks, "sin" is far more of a barrier between us and our God than we could ever imagine. We have only to consider that it took God the Father sending His Own beloved Son to suffer and to die to pay the debt that our sin deserves to be able to see that in God's eyes, sin is wrong beyond measure and that it has to be removed from our being so completely that no vestige of it can ever be seen in us for all eternity.

With that being said, let's look at these words of scripture beginning in verse 2 of Luke chapter 3.

² during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. ³ And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet,
"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁵ Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, ⁶ and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" (Luke 3:2-6)

As we begin to consider these precious truths this morning, please bear with me as I take a moment to again lay down some of the foundational truths that we have been studying over the past few weeks, truths that have led up to this moment in the life of this very special man of God, John the Baptist?

First, let me remind us again that John was just an ordinary man, much like you and me. Why is that important to establish. It's because we have a tendency to attach more significance to men than should ever take place.

At one point in his ministry, that very thing took place with John and his disciples. His message and his personality were so powerful that some of them, began to wonder if he might be more than just a prophet, if he might actually be the Messiah.

But John answered them clearly and emphatically that he was not, that he was nothing more than a friend, that he was not even fit to untie the shoelaces of the Messiah.

And John's words should serve to help you and me to know and to remember to never place common men on a pedestal, no matter how powerful or persuasive their personalities might be.

But John does serve as an encouraging testimony to us, that yes, God can take ordinary people, even men and women like you and me, and can set us apart for a very special purpose in life.

God did not just hand-pick John the Baptist out of a select group of men. No, not at all! God actually wove John together in his mother's womb, weaving into his heart, soul, mind, spirit and DNA a person who was befitted for this one purpose, to be set apart as an emissary, a forerunner who would go out ahead of the soon-coming true Messiah and "prepare the way" for Him, to "make straight His paths" in the wilderness. To soften and befit the soils within men and women's hearts so that they could believe and receive the salvation message that Jesus would later bring to them.

And I must tell you that I rejoice when I am able to clearly see the way that God transcends the many generations of time, as He did in prophesying about John over 700 years before he was born, and then to see God reach His omnipotent hand into time and circumstances and actually make His plans and purposes take place.

Folks, there are many well-meaning people today who insist that all the things we see taking place in John's life were done merely through the "free will" of

John and others, but it simply is not so. John the Baptist was clearly being guided and directed by the very hand of God. He was a “vessel” in the “Potter’s hand”, a useful instrument, chosen and molded into shape for noble purposes by the Great Potter who created him.

John’s mission was to go out ahead of the Lord Jesus and to prepare the ground on which Jesus would sow His seeds of salvation and righteousness. And God had equipped John with a very special implement by which he could accomplish his task, a strong and compelling call to “repentance”.

The nature of sin within our souls is so strong and so pervasive and so normal to the common activities of our lives, that our souls become hardened to it. Sinful behaviors and habits are often so imbedded within our personalities that we don’t even recognize that they are there. And even when we do see their presence, we are more apt to try to make some foolish excuse rather than actually do something about them.

But that would be the special ministry that God had called and equipped John the Baptist to carry out, to go out ahead of the Lord Jesus and to begin to up-turn the ground, to “break through” the hardened sinful surfaces of men’s souls. And he would do it with the simple words of a call to “repentance”.

Think with me for a moment! What could there have been present within the simple words “repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand” that could do such powerful work within men and women’s souls?

I have no doubt that as John spoke those words it was the almighty power of the Holy Spirit, a special mixture of love and grace and conviction and fear and “dread of consequences”, all bundled together that caused men and women to turn and cry out for forgiveness from their sins.

In these days that we call “the New Testament Church”, these days of “grace”, we often confuse ourselves into thinking that such things as the “law” and “fear of the Lord” are outdated and are not a part of “grace”.

But that is not so. These truths are for all generations. And these scriptures tell us clearly that “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”. And that “fear of the Lord” is an effective instrument when used in the right way . . . and it will bring men and women to Christ.

And again, I have no doubt that “fear” was a strong and persuasive part of John’s message that penetrated the hardened surfaces of men and women’s souls and caused them to turn their hearts to repentance.

When I read these words about repentance, I am reminded of the words of Hebrews chapter 4. Listen for a moment! Hebrews 4, verse 12,

¹² . . . the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give account*.
(Hebrews 4:12-13)

God’s words have a powerful life residing within them, the power of the Holy Spirit. And that power can reach into men’s souls, piercing deeply even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

God’s word was John’s special powerful instrument as he called out for men and women to examine themselves, to see the sin that prevailed in their lives and to repent and turn from it.

And John’s call to repentance took the people beyond just being sorry for the way that they behaved and the way that they cheated and mistreated other people. John’s call to repentance reminded them that their sins were against God and that with God, consequences are eternal.

I confess to you that in my own life, I am often more concerned with the temporal and immediate consequences for my sins, if I go over the speed limit will a policeman give me a speeding ticket, if I cheat on my taxes will the IRS catch me doing it, or if I look at another woman, will my wife be broken-hearted.

Yes, we do need to be aware that our sinful behavior can hurt us and can hurt other people, but that is only a very small effect of sin. Much more than all of that, sin is a violation against God Himself. Sin is a personal offense against the very person and character of God. And to personally violate the person of God brings eternal consequences.

God is holy, and in His holiness, He cannot allow any form of sin to exist in His presence, neither past sins, present sins, nor future sins. And that leaves you and me and every other person with a very serious problem.

We are, by nature, sinners and if we carry even one of our sins with us throughout our day, God cannot fellowship with us. And if we carry our sin on before the judgment seat of God, we will surely perish . . . eternally.

David, in his sin with Bathsheba is one of the clearest examples of sinfulness and of the need for Godly repentance. Yes, David hurt many people with his sin. He corrupted his own soul. He violated another man's wife. He plotted sin and then plotted the murder of his friend Uriah. He involved other people in the conspiracy to murder his friend. And his sins went on and on.

But when the Holy Spirit convicted David of his sin, David came to understand what his offenses were truly all about. And thankfully David responded well. He took the right path to repentance. Listen to David's cry to God, given in Psalm 51.

- 1 Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
- 2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.
- 3 For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin *is* always before me.
- 4 Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done *this* evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just when You speak,
And blameless when You judge.
- 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
- 6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts,
And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.
- 7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8 Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.

- 9 Hide Your face from my sins,
And blot out all my iniquities.
- 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- 11 Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.
- 13 *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.
- 14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
The God of my salvation,
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.
- 15 O Lord, open my lips,
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.
- 16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;
You do not delight in burnt offering.
- 17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise. (Psalm 51:1-17)

David had what would be described in 2 Corinthians 7:10 as “Godly sorrow”.
Listen again to those words that I read for us a few moments ago!

¹⁰Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no
regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

David was not just sorry that he got caught, or sorry that he would suffer
consequences for his sin. David was truly sorry that he had violated the person
and the character of God.

Let me ask you, how do you deal with this matter of sin? Is it a private matter
that you keep to yourself? Do you ever think that if no one else sees my sin, then
I am OK?

When you find yourself caught up in a lie, or in gossip, or in slander, or caught up
in cheating on a business matter or with your taxes, or perhaps letting vulgar,
profane thoughts linger in your mind, what is your response? Do you ever stop to
realize, as David did, that God really does know every thought that is in your

mind, long before it comes to your lips or long before you actually do a vile or vulgar thing?

Folks, God loves us as His dearly beloved children and He sympathizes with our weaknesses, but please understand that He cannot tolerate the sin that fomented and erupts out of our souls. And His remedy is for us to repent, to turn from our sin, confess it to Him and seek His forgiveness.

That was John's message to the people of his day, and it is God's message to you and me of our day.

So then, before we pray, may we bow our heads in silence for a few moments and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to our mind specific sins that we harbor within our own hearts. And then, please, please do confess those sins to God and ask Him to forgive you for those sins and to lead you in His ways of righteousness.

These words of 2 Corinthians 7:10 as we close,

¹⁰Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (2 Corinthians 7:10)

May we pray