

Repentance Matthew 21:28-31

This morning we are going to look at the importance of repentance in responding to the grace of God. As always the Bible will be our guide.

The N.T. reveals the great love Jesus showed sinners. He ate with tax collectors, he touched the lepers, and he healed the sick. We need to understand that Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost – Luke 19:10, but he never left people where he found them, in John 5:14 we see a common teaching of Jesus, “*do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.*” Jesus lifts us up out of sin and transforms our lives.

The N.T. word “*repentance*” comes from the Greek word *metanoia*: “*meta*” means “after” and “*noia*” means thought. Repentance then is an afterthought. People use an afterthought to mend their ways, to change their thinking. An afterthought yields to us a new way of thinking, different from our former thoughts. Considering the destructive nature of sin and the loving grace of God, penitent people have a change of heart and mind that leads us to change of life and behavior.

The Lord Jesus was and still is in the saving business, but salvation includes transforming the lives of those who follow Him. This transformation includes what God would do for us in His grace and forgiveness, and what we must do. God expects His people to believe and repent. The Lord Jesus preached repentance to the Jews of His day. And after his baptism and temptation Jesus began His ministry preaching throughout Galilee. Mt. 4:17 says, “*From*

that time Jesus began to preach and say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

When the Pharisees grumbled at Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus replied in Luke 5:31-32, *“It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”*

When Jesus sent the 12 out into the towns and villages of Galilee, He called for those cities to repent. When some of the towns rejected Jesus, Mt. 11:20-24 records this: *“²⁰Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. ²¹“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ²²But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ²³And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. ²⁴But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”*

Jesus was serious then and He is serious now. While it is true that He loves sinners, it is also true that He calls them to repent. Repentance is not optional. If you wish to please God and be right with Him, we must repent. Luke 13 tells of some people who told Jesus about some Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Jesus responded to them thusly in Luke 13:2-5, *“Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴Or those*

eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” If we wish to please the Lord, then we too must repent.

Paul in his sermon on Mars’ Hill told the pagan philosophers in Acts 17:30-31, “*Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.*” God will not do your repenting for you, as some people suppose. God commands all people, including you and me to repent.

Likewise Peter called men to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38. In 2 Peter 3:9 the apostle Peter wrote, “*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.*” God does not want anyone to be lost; but when people refuse to repent, they sadly choose their sins over God. When people say no to God, they perish.

On the other hand, God celebrates when people change their lives and serve Him. In Luke 15:4-7 we see this joy, “*What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice*

with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” When a person turns his life around and leaves sin, the God of heaven rejoices.

Repentance is not punishment; it is actually a healing for our souls. Don’t worry about all the things you have to give up for God; you will see that your heart rejoices when you live righteously. The heart that loves God finds new and wonderful pleasures in this new style of living. What you are doing is trading old, destructive habits for a new and real joy in Christ. You don’t give up all pleasure and joy in life when you become a Christian, what you give us is the temporary, sinful pleasures that end up enslaving and destroying you. In giving up the temporary pleasures of sin in this life, you replace it with a new spiritual joy that is indescribable and everlasting. In John 10:10 Jesus said, ***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”*** Our life in Christ is not only abundant, but it gets better and better as we go through this life and ends up in joy indescribable in heaven.

Repentance is more than ceasing to sin. While repentance requires a person to stop doing evil, it also turns his heart to the Lord. A penitent person learns to despise the evil he did in the past, yes; but repentance also plants in the heart a hunger and thirst for righteousness. A penitent person wants to please God everyday and completely. The Ephesians made their repentance known by turning from paganism and superstition, in Acts 19:18-20 we read, ***“¹⁸Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹And a number of those who had***

practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.” I wonder if there are some sinful things in our lives that might need to be destroyed – books, DVD’s, songs that we might need to get rid of openly for all to see. Just like they did in Ephesus (worth 50,000 pieces of silver.) They could have sold them and earned some of that money back – but they didn’t instead they burned them so no one else would practice the evil they are giving up. This action allowed the word of the Lord to continue to increase and prevail mightily.

When a person repents, he must also fill his life with the Lord and His teaching. Jesus gave us this illustration in Mt. 22:43-45 to make this point, “*When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. ⁴⁴Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.*” When a person is forgiven of sin but fails to fill his life with the Lord, he becomes vulnerable to terrible sins coming back into his heart. One may cease to do evil, but real repentance means one lovingly fill his life with the Lord’s way.

When a person repents, he will truly be sorry for his sins against God. He is sorry that he hurt and grieved God by his transgression of God’s law. He is also sorry when he realizes that Jesus suffered on the cross for his sin. The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:24, “*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might*

die to sin and live to righteousness; by His wounds you were healed.” It was our sins, our lust, and our selfishness that sent Jesus to the cross. Repentance means that we have taken seriously how grievous sin is to God and how destructive it is to us.

You see sin separates us from God. But thankfully, God is willing to forgive when we repent. But once we come to God, we can no longer remain in sin. Paul once asked in Romans 6:1-2, “***What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin live in it?***” Because we love God, we can’t keep grieving God with our sins.

Now a penitent person is also sorry for his sins against other people. He realizes that his sins have caused other people to suffer. We hurt others with what we say and do. When we sin, we teach others to sin. Jesus said that one who sets a stumbling block for a little one sins grievously (Mt. 18:6-9). The penitent person also mourns because of the hurt that his sin has caused against himself. Solomon in Proverbs 5:22 says, “***His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin.***” Every person who sins eventually has to face the consequences of his sin. The sinner’s life unalterably ends in misery and regret.

But the person who loves God wants something different. He wants an opportunity to change his life and live a clean and righteous life. After his sin, with Bathsheba, David said, “***Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.***” A hungering to do right is what fills the heart of the penitent man or woman. This sorrow for sin and hunger for righteousness means that we will hate what is evil and love what is good.

Romans 12:9 says “***Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.***”

If we love God we will hate what is evil and hurtful. I can love a thief while hating the evil that he does. I can love a drunk while hating the evil a drunk does to his family when he is drunk. Christians call people to change their behavior because they love them, and they know how sinful behavior will cause them harm. We don't speak out against sin because we are haters of people, no! We speak out against sin because we hate the evil and harm of sin. We must always remember that Christians are to love their enemies and pray for them.

In 2 Tim. 2:24-26 Paul describes how a Christian should deal with those caught up in sin. *“²⁴ **And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,** ²⁵ **correcting his opponents with gentleness.** God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ **and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.**”* God is in the saving business, and that means we, his people are in the saving business as well. People can be deceived by the devil and they can think that they are right spiritually, when they are actually lost. This is why we are not to be quarrelsome, but kind, teaching patiently enduring evil and correcting our opponents' with gentleness.

Sin can harden the hearts of man, but only the words and the love of Jesus can soften the harden heart.

God won't force you to repent, but he does lovingly appeal to you to repent. But remember this, if there is no repentance, neither is there any pardon. The Lord promises forgiveness to penitent people who change their lives. But there is no promise for the person who time after time refuses to obey God. One-day their will be an end to God's patience and a day of reckoning will

appear. Isaiah 55:6-7 says *“Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”*

Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change of life. We repent because we love the Lord and we believe Him. Faith, love and repentance begin in the heart. If this morning you believe and love the Lord and have repented of your sins, confess Christ and be baptized in His name. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ. And when you are baptized God will wash away your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit – this is according to Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16. Why hesitate? You never know when your life might end and then comes judgment day. Will you not come as we stand and sing our invitation song?