

Repentance Mt. 21:28-32

Last week we explored what it means to believe in Jesus Christ. Today we will look at the importance of repentance in responding to the grace of God. **As always, the Bible will be our guide.**

I once heard it said, *“You cannot repent too soon, because you don’t know how soon it will be too late.”*

The N.T. reveals the great love that Jesus showed sinners. The Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with tax-collectors and sinners. Even though the Pharisees were a relatively small group in Jewish society, they did manage to bully people into following their human traditions. They had no room in their hearts for those who would not follow their dictates. But Jesus followed a truer, better path, that showed the love and compassion of God for all.

Luke 19:10 reveals this about Jesus, ***“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*** Just because Jesus loved sinners didn’t mean that he tolerated their sin. Jesus told the man He healed on the sabbath day in **Jn. 5:14**, ***“do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.”*** Jesus seeks us to save us from sin, but by the very nature of salvation He can’t leave us where He finds us. He 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, a way different from our former thoughts. Consider the destructive nature of sin and the loving grace of God, penitent people have a change of heart and mind that leads to a change of life and behavior.

The Lord Jesus was and still is in the saving business, but salvation includes transforming the life of those who follow Him. That 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. Jesus Himself preached repentance 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 responded, ***“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,”*** (Lk. 5:31-32).

When Jesus sent out the 12 into the towns and villages of Galilee, He called for those cities to repent. When some of those towns began to reject Jesus, Mt. 11:20-34 records

this: *“Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. “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. But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And 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. But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”*

While it is true that Jesus loves sinners, it is also true that when He calls people to repentance, He is serious. **If we wish to please God and be right with Him, we must repent.** Let’s read about some folks who told Jesus about some Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. **Luke 13:1-5** says, *“There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or 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? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”* If we wish to please the Lord, we too must repent.

Paul in his sermon on Mars Hill told the pagan philosopher of Athens, *“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead,”* (**Acts 17:30-31**). God won’t do your repenting for you, as some suppose. God commands you and everyone else to repent.

Peter likewise 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** He wrote, *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”* God doesn’t want anyone to be lost; but when people refuse to repent, they sadly choose their sins over God. When people say not to God, they perish.

On the other hand, when people change their lives and serve Him, He celebrates! Jesus told this parable in **Luke 15:4-7**, *“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? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And 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.’ 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 his sin, the God of Heaven rejoices.

Some might think of repentance as a punishment; actually, it is healing for the soul. Some worry about all things they will have to give up, but the heart that loves God finds new and wonderful pleasures in living righteously. He trades the old, destructive habits for a new and real joy in Christ. You don’t give up all pleasure to become a Christian. You give up the temporary, sinful pleasures that end up enslaving and destroying you. But you take on new, spiritual joys that are indescribable and everlasting. Jesus said in **Jn. 10:10**, that ***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*** We have abundant life in Jesus.

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; but repentance also plants in the heart a hunger and thirst for righteousness. A penitent person wants to please God completely. The Ephesians made known their repentance by turning from paganism and superstition, ***“And many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And 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,”*** (**Acts 19:18-19**). I wonder if there are some sinful things in our lives that also need to be destroyed. They may be books or movies or songs. We need to rid our hearts of evil thoughts, ugly ways, and selfish intent.

When a person repents, he must also fill his life with the teaching of Jesus. Jesus gave this illustration in **Mt. 12:43-45**, ***“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then 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. Then 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 fills his life with the Lord’s way.

When a person repents, he will be truly sorry for his sin against God. He’s sorry that he hurt and grieved God by his transgression of His law. He is also sorry when he realizes that Jesus suffered on the cross for his sin. Peter puts it this way in **1 Peter 2:24-25**, ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”*** It was our sins,

our lusts, 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.

You see sin separates us from God. 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 that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”* Because we love God, we can’t keep grieving God with our sins.

A penitent person is also sorry for 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 before a little one sins grievously (**Mt. 18:6-9**). The penitent person also mourns because of the hurt that sin has caused against himself. Solomon wrote, *“The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.”* (**Prov. 5:22**). Every person who sins eventually has to face the consequences of his sin. The sinner’s life unalterably ends in misery and regret.

A 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 longed for something better than his selfish, lustful, and hurtful ways. In **Psalms 51:10ff** He said, *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”* Hungering to do what is good and right fills the heart of a penitent man. This sorrow for sin and hunger of righteousness means he will hate what is evil and love what is good. Paul in **Romans 12:9** says, *“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.”* God does not say to hate evil people; He says to hate what is evil.

So, if I love God, I 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 while 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; we speak out against sin because we hate the evil and the harm of sin. Christians 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. He says, *“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”* God is truly in the saving business, and so are we. But people can be so

deceived by the devil that they think they are all right spiritually, when they are actually lost.

Why do Christians ask people to repent? I want you to understand this; we ask people to repent and change their ways, because we love them and we want God's blessing to be given to all men. And you can't be right with God without repenting of your sins and turning to Him. Sin hardens the heart and cause one to be lost. **Romans 6:23** say, "***the wages of sin is death.***" And we want all men to repent and be saved; so that all can know Christ and the joy of forgiveness and have eternal life.

God won't force you to repent, but He does lovingly appeal to you to repent. And you need to understand this biblical truth – 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 and again refuses to obey God. The Bible teaches that one day the patience of God will come to an end and there will be a day of reckoning. **Is. 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; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.***" If we delay our repentance even one more day, we have a day more to repent of, and a day less to repent in.

Some young people came to a wise, old man and asked, "*When should we repent?*" The old man answered, "*Repent the day before you die.*" The young people objected, "*But we don't know when we will die.*" And the old man replied, "*Then repent today.*"

Instead of making excuses for your sin, I am calling for you to repent today, for you know not what might happen tomorrow. Remember the parable about the rich farmer who built more barns so that he could sit back and relax for the rest of his life? That day God called his soul to judgment – you see, we really don't know when our time will come, as the wise old man pointed out, "*Then repent today.*"

Once again, repentance is a change of heart that leads to a change of life. We repent because we love the Lord and we believe in Him. Faith, love, and repentance begin in the heart. I hope this day that your heart looks at the old way of sin as something to reject. I hope that you have a hunger for righteousness. And if you believe and love the Lord and have repented of your sins, then I call you this day to confess Christ and be baptized in His name so that God will wash away your sins – this is in accordance with the Lord's command in Mt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; and Acts 2:38 – with Paul's example from his own life in Acts 22:16. Won't you obey the Lord Today?