

Mark 1:14-15
Galatians 5:16-26

March 1, 2021

Repentance

Last week our Lent Experience focus was on silence and solitude before the Lord. Psalm 46:10 says: *Be still and know that I am God!* Most of the time when we pray, we do all the talking. But silence in the presence of the Almighty teaches us to listen for His voice.

Psalm 37:7 reminds: *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.* We need times in our week when we slow down and become still because it is vital for our souls. Psalm 23 tells us what that quiet time is for: *...he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul...* Restoration is necessary because the world drains our spiritual nature. We need to recharge our spiritual batteries.

Cleansing Our Souls

We can hardly recharge our spiritual batteries if they are dirty and corroded. Repentance is a way that God cleanses our souls. Repentance leads us to cultivate godliness while eradicating habits that lead into sin. Jesus began His ministry like this: *He...went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"* Mark 1:14-15.

The kingdom of God is near repent! Why and repent of what? We are rubbing elbows every day with people who do not believe they have anything to repent of. "I'm a good person," they say, "I don't murder, steal, commit adultery, etc... (and I'm glad they don't). But little do they know how much the values of the worldly culture have seeped into their hearts, coloring how they see everything. Furthermore, the list of attitudes and behaviors considered bad by the drifting culture, is fast shrinking. Values that once held our society together are being turned upside down. If you "go with the flow," just like water, it always leaves you at the lowest point.

Now most Christians can think of things to repent of that include: mean and selfish attitudes about certain people, broken relations with family, co-workers, fellow church members, others in the community. Christians may list bad habits that draw them into useless or unsavory activities; bad choices that bring them into more sin and confusion. (I'm sure you can think of many.)

But these things are all downstream from the thing Jesus is really calling us to repent of. Ever since the Fall, when Adam & Eve chose to turn their backs on God, humanity has been moving away from their one and only Creator. The result has been, and is, the swamp of human selfishness and greed and lust for power that has brought the world millennia of war, tyranny, suffering, injustice, and death. Until our souls are cleansed, we will be filled with and live by those values, which this fallen world promotes. Jesus is calling us to repent of our fallen, sinful nature, and take on the new nature He offers.

Meaning Of Repentance

What does Scripture teach about repentance? The most common translation of "repent" is "turn" or "return." In context, the admonitions to repent mean "to turn from evil, and to turn to the good." The prophet Ezekiel voiced God's call to the people of Israel: *'Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways,' declares the Sovereign LORD.*

'Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall,' Ezekiel 18:30.

And again: *Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?'* Ezekiel 33:11.

Repentance means to turn around from the wrong direction you're going and go the right way. God uses Scripture, other believers, prophets if you will, even tragic or difficult events to get our attention so that we'll realize we're going in the wrong direction. If you make a wrong turn while driving an automobile, as soon as you realize it you immediately turn around and go in the right direction again. (BTW, if everything is coming your way, you might be in the wrong lane!)

Repentance is a recognition of need. It is an admission that you have a problem that you cannot fix. We are born into this broken world and without an awakening we all simply follow the ways of sinful humanity. Therefore, repentance begins with an awareness of your own personal need. But our human nature is so full of excuses and evasions for wrongdoing, that it is not always obvious or easy to admit our need for God. We'd prefer to say, "I'm sorry" and get on to how we are living.

Jesus encountered the same response among the people when He walked this earth. His gospel message was simple: repent and believe. But many did not think they had a need to repent. So, Jesus responded by saying, *It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance,*" Luke 5:31-32. Until you admit that you have a problem and acknowledge your sins, Jesus cannot fix you.

Repentance is action. There is more to repentance than confessing sins. Confession of sins is often nothing more than mere lip service to God. *These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught,* Isaiah 29:13. Many people confess their sins, but there is no real change in their lives—either in their attitudes or their actions. Repentance is a change of thinking that results in a change of actions. It's like this:

Confession = acknowledgment & agreement with God about my sins.

Repentance = to think differently so that we live differently.

The repentance of the Bible is repenting of the sinful nature. Unless we truly do turn around, leave behind the trail of tears and strife of the fallen and sinful world; unless we turn from that and follow the path of our Savior, we'll never reach the kingdom of God.

A Fruitful Life

Many of us have known men and women who were said to have lived a fruitful life. They accomplished much in their chosen field of endeavor, added value to their

community, and so on. And all of that is good. Let me add to those notions the idea of lasting, eternal, spiritual fruit in your lives.

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by preaching repentance, but he also called for tangible evidence of repentance. He cried out to the people, *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham,* Luke 3:8. If there is no change in your life, there has been no true repentance! It matters not that you've been a church member for years or your parents were. If you have truly repented, it should be evident in your life by a change of character and conduct. The key is to turn to God, not just in mind but in heart and soul; that's what brings about a changed life.

Help Is On The Way

We've been over this lesson before: it's not about trying harder to be good. That won't work. Cease depending upon your own works of righteousness - which the Bible calls filthy rags. Merely accepting the facts about Jesus to be true won't save you either. Jesus explained that if you truly believe you will receive Him. So, believing according to Jesus involves receiving the very person of Jesus Christ Himself. This means to personally receive Jesus Christ as the Lord in your life. Yet grasp this: you must also believe on Christ as your life.

Yielding your life to Jesus does not mean you give up who you are. God is not calling you to be another Jesus. He is calling you to be who He made you to be, and to see the world and people through the eyes of Jesus. We can only do so when we let the Holy Spirit be our strength and guide. Come Holy Spirit should be our usual prayer.

The fact is, we need the very Spirit of Christ Himself to fill us, equip us, and empower us to stay on the path toward the kingdom of God. As He fills you, you will produce good spiritual fruit of eternal value. Come Holy Spirit, fill us. He is Jesus' gift to us. He is our helper and advocate. ... *the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered,* Romans 8:26.

Pray confidently for spiritual awakening, as the Apostle Paul says: *Awake, sleeper, arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you,* Ephesians 5:14. Get up, turn around, take steps in God's direction, and pray fervently that the Lord would fill you. Arise and shine and pray fervently that God would grant mercy and grace to our church and our nation.

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength... Isaiah 30:15.