

## **The Place for Repentance in the Gospel**

Luke

42-200

I want to ask you, if you will, to return with me to the 15th chapter of Luke. For those who are visiting with us we are in a study of the gospel of Luke that goes on and on and on and enriches us week in and week out on Sunday mornings. And we find ourselves in one of the great chapters of Luke, in fact, one of the great chapters of the Bible, the 15th chapter, and the theme of this chapter, we have been noting, is heaven's joy, recovering the lost.

15th Chapter of Luke is made up of three familiar parables, one about a lost sheep, one about a lost coin, and a final one about a lost son, really two lost sons, one found and one not. And Jesus is teaching us much here about what makes heaven rejoice. That really is the theme of the chapter. When the sheep is found there is joy and rejoicing. When the coin is found there is joy and rejoicing, and when the son is found there is joy and rejoicing. And in every case this is the picture of heaven's celebration over the recovery of a lost sinner.

You will remember in verse 7 that Jesus said, "I tell you in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." And again in verse 10, "in the same way I tell you there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

We have gone through the first two stories, the story about the man with a hundred sheep who lost one and found it and brought it back and had a celebration. The story about a lady who had ten coins, lost one, found it and brought it back and also had a celebration. It's very clear that this is about what makes heaven rejoice. But there's an element in both stories that we haven't really addressed and before we look at the story of the prodigal son, as it's known, which we will begin next week, but before we do that I want to draw your attention to a twice-repeated phrase, once in verse 7 and again in verse 10. It is this phrase: one sinner who repents; one sinner who repents.

I want to talk to you about repentance. The message of salvation, by the way, can be fatally compromised by what is left out, by what is not said. And it seems to me that professing Christians have become very adept at what they don't say. And one of the things that is not popular to be talked about is this matter of repentance. But in these two stories it is crystal clear in the words of Jesus that the sinner's part in being restored is repentance, and that what makes heaven rejoice is repentance. And that heaven finds no joy over the ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Heaven's joy is directly connected to repentance and repentance here is simply our Lord's way of expressing the true heart of one who is restored to God. In each case the feature of the story is that God, the seeker, goes to find what belongs to Him and bring it back and heaven rejoices. But in both cases this is not apart from the repentance of the one who is found.

The same is true in the story of the prodigal. He says in verse 18, "I will get up and go to my father and say to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired men.'" And again in verse 21, "Father, I have sinned against heaven in your sight. I am no longer to be called...worthy to be called your son."

We will see repentance enriched as we get into that final story of the prodigal son, but, in each case, repentance is an important critical element. Sinners who repent bring joy to heaven. People who think they need no repentance bring no joy to heaven. That is to fall short of true salvation. You can talk about the gospel, you can talk about Christ, you can talk about faith, but you cannot talk about it apart from repentance and have a true gospel.

This has become such a missing element in our contemporary Christianity that there was a survey of evangelical leaders just a couple of years ago and the question was asked them: "What is the gospel?" Now these were not man-on-the-street interviews. These were select evangelical leaders well known to everybody. Nine of them asked to define the gospel message we are to preach: What is it? This would seem to be to be pretty basic stuff that not only should every leader know but every Christian should know. Each of these nine leaders was limited to a maximum of 300 to express this. Nearly all of them said to do so was a great challenge. Though they were all self-confessed theologians and evangelists they found this a great challenge to articulate the gospel message. Six of the nine wrote their statements in full without ever mentioning the word "repentance." Three of them used it without defining it or even describing it. One of those three said it was a synonym for faith. In the whole treatment there is not one word to explain either the importance or the meaning of repentance.

And as I said, compromise can be accomplished readily by what you leave out. That is, frankly, a window on the current evangelical thinking. There is no particular interest in repentance. There is no real call for true repentance, again among even the leaders. Little wonder then that there are so many shallow and meaningless expressions of quote-unquote "Christian" profession. And frankly it's not as if repentance is a small detail. It is absolutely central, so that without it there is no such thing as salvation. But this seems to me to be the primary missing element in our brand of evangelism today. To leave it out is frankly to utterly ignore the clear testimony of Scripture.

Let me take you back to the 3rd chapter of Luke. That's a good place to start as we just talk about repentance a little bit. This will be a Bible study really. Luke chapter 3, and I want you to understand how important this matter of repentance is, how central it is for your own sake lest you have made some superficial repentance or some superficial affirmation of faith in Christ that is not a saving faith, not tied to a true repentance.

So let's look Luke chapter 3, and John the Baptist...John the Baptist, who comes, according to chapter 3, into the district around the Jordan. This is the forerunner of the Messiah, and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. We go back to the fact that salvation is deliverance from sin. It is about forgiveness. We are preaching not a message of a better life, not a message of a happy life. We are preaching a message of forgiveness of sins, which removes one from the power of sin and the penalty of sin and someday even from the presence of sin. It is all about being delivered from sin.

John preached repentance, repent to be forgiven, and his baptism was a symbolic external rite demonstrating outwardly what God would do inwardly in washing a person from their sin if they were truly repentant in their trust in Him.

Matthew 3:6, John says, "The people were coming down to the river," Matthew says rather, "The people were coming down to the river to John and confessing their sins." John's baptism didn't save. Water doesn't save anybody, but it symbolizes the cleansing God gives to true repenters who trust in Him for forgiveness by grace.

Now John the Baptist did not introduce this. This wasn't something brand new. It wasn't something that he invented or something in the New Testament only, and I want to show you that. The nature of repentance can be seen lots of places in the Old Testament, but a good start would be Psalm 32. Psalm 32, familiar to us, the plaintive heart-felt words of David, Psalm 32, he writes: "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit." That is to say how blessed is the man who has truly been forgiven. He says in verse 3, "When I kept silent about my sin my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me. My vitality, my life's juices were drained away as with the fever heat of summer." He's experiencing physical effects of his guilt and the pain and anxiety of his own iniquity. Verse 5, "I acknowledged my sin to Thee, my iniquity I did not hide. I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin." He went from the agony and the physical suffering of bearing his own guilt to coming before the Lord, acknowledging, confessing, uncovering, and being forgiven, and being then blessed by having his sin forgiven and covered. That is what repentance is. It is to open up to God and to confess all your sin and to be heard and to be forgiven.

In Psalm 51, again a great Psalm of confession familiar to you, David again writes, "Be gracious to me, oh God, according to Thy loving kindness; according to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me." Here is what repentance is. It is a cry from the depths of the heart for rescue, for washing, for cleansing, for deliverance from sin. It is also the knowledge that this sin violates God: Verse 4, "Against Thee, Thee only I have sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight." Over in verse 10 he then pleads, "Create in me a clean heart, oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence. Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." This is a pleading.

Verse 14: "Deliver me from blood guiltiness, oh God, Thou God of my salvation. Then my tongue will joyfully sing of thy righteousness." Verse 17, he says, "The sacrifices that please God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart." This is what confession is. This is what repentance is. It is an overwhelming sense of guilt and remorse about sin that causes one to cry out to be delivered.

Some other Old Testament illustrations; one is in the opening chapter of Isaiah, the great prophet Isaiah in chapter 1. This marvelous prophecy begins with a terrible indictment against Judah, against the people of Israel, who have sinned. Verse 4 of Isaiah 1: "Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evil-doers, sons who act corruptly." It's generationally corrupt. "You've abandoned the Lord, despised the Holy One of Israel, turned away from Him." Verse 5 says, "Where will you be stricken again?"

It's as if you've sinned to the max, you've sinned so extensively you have imposed upon yourself

such wounds and such pains and such injuries and such bruises by your self-inflicted rebellion that he says, "The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts, and raw wounds not pressed out or bandaged, not softened with oil." You have inflicted so much damage on yourself with your sin there's nowhere left to be damaged. "Your land is desolate, your cities are burned with fire. Your fields are in the care of strangers, desolation everywhere." And down in verse 16 he says, "Wash yourselves. Make yourselves clean. Remove the evil of your deeds from my sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. This is repentance.

Verse 18, those blessed words: "Come now let us reason together, says the Lord." Think this one through. "Though your sins are as scarlet, they'll be as white as snow, though they're red like crimson, they'll be as wool." All you have to do is repent. All you have to do is come to me and cry out and I'll make you absolutely pure. This is again a call for repentance.

In the 55th chapter of Isaiah, another familiar call, verse 6 Isaiah 55, "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." He'll make you as white as snow, as white as wool. He will abundantly pardon. All He asks is that you repent.

This is part and parcel, as always, of coming to God, a heart of repentance. When Jonah preached in Nineveh Chapter 3 verse 5, the people of Nineveh believed in God, that's faith, and they called a fast, put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them, and verse 10, "They turned from their wicked way." Believing in God and turning from sin, repentance and faith. They go together. They're absolutely inseparable.

I want to show you a passage in Ezekiel because it's consistent with everything else the Old Testament says about repentance. Listen to Ezekiel 18:30, "Therefore I will judge you oh house of Israel, each according to his conduct." I'm going to judge you individually; I'm going to judge you one-on-one, and so in light of that judgment on your sins declares the Lord God. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions, which you've committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why will you die oh house of Israel? I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies. Therefore, repent and live, declares the Lord God." Again the call is to repent. What does that mean? Turn away from your transgressions. Cast away your transgressions. You find the same kind of calls to repentance repeated all throughout the Old Testament and all throughout the writings of the prophets.

Ezekiel 33:19, "When the wicked turns from his wickedness and practices justice and righteousness, he will live." Eternal life, spiritual life, the life of God, heavenly life comes to those who, believing in God, that's a given, repent.

Now with that as a background let's go back to Luke chapter 3, and back to John the Baptist. Because John the Baptist came preaching a baptism of repentance that everybody would understand. Especially the religious leaders would understand that, especially the Pharisees and the scribes to whom Jesus addressed the three parables of Luke 15. He's talking about repentance. They have to know what the Bible says about repentance. They studied the Scriptures fastidiously. They knew that God demanded repentance, and yet they were stubbornly self-righteous and thought

they needed no repentance. They minimized repentance and so had no capacity to bring joy to heaven. Rather they brought to God great disappointment because He has no pleasure in the death of the impenitent.

But John came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, which was consistent with what the Old Testament called for. John borrows from another Old Testament passage, the 40th chapter of Isaiah, and he borrows verses 3 through 5 of Isaiah 40, and he...it is included here. Luke writes this in his gospel. Matthew quotes this. Mark quotes it and John quotes it. All four of the biblical gospels quote this passage and connect it to the ministry of John the Baptist, which leads me to believe that John the Baptist must have made reference to it. He came preaching as it is written. That is, of course, Luke's commentary, but I'm sure it was John's message. He must have preached this great Old Testament text from Isaiah chapter 40. And we know that from Matthew 3:3 because John is the one who is the voice "crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord.'" It must have been what he said. It must have been his message.

Now therein lies the connection that I want you to notice. He preached repentance and you see what it is by looking at verses 4 and 5. Here is the definition of repentance taken out of Isaiah chapter 40. "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Make ready the way of the Lord. Make His paths straight.' Every ravine shall be filled up. Every mountain and hill shall be brought low. The crooked shall be become straight, the rough road smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." This was John's message. John was doing something that everybody would understand. He was the forerunner to the Messiah. The Messiah was the Anointed One, the King; the greatest one who would ever come. The Jews had all their hopes, of course, in Messiah and they knew what the custom was. If a great monarch or a great leader was coming to your town or your village you prepared the road. Roads were rough in those days and especially in the land of Israel. The terrain is so uneven there, so when a monarch would come they would get everything ready. They would bring up the low places, lower the high places, straighten out the crooked places, get all the debris off the pathway and make a fitting highway so that there would be some ease for the coming monarch and to demonstrate their appreciation and to show him proper honor and dignity.

Well that's what John wanted to do for the Messiah, but it wasn't a physical highway that John was getting ready. It was the highway to the hearts of the people. John is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. John is out there in the desert telling people to get ready for the coming of the King, to get ready for the coming of Messiah. He's out there shouting to prepare the highway.

They are not to think of the Messiah coming in the physical sense as a military, political, sovereign of the land, but he's saying you need to be ready in your heart. You need to repent of your sin and put our trust in God and His coming Messiah so that you can see, as verse 6 says, "the salvation of God." That is to say that salvation comes only to a prepared heart. So he says, "Make ready the way of the Lord," not into Jerusalem and not into Judea, but into your heart. That's his message. Get your heart ready.

And how do you do that? You make the path straight. You get your life straightened out. Make a straight path on which the King can come. And that's going to involve some things. Every ravine shall be filled up. And in the metaphoric language of John, as well as Isaiah, this is an analogous to the deep things in life, those things that are way down below the surface that nobody knows about, the dark things of the heart. They've got to be buried. They've got to be done away with. They've got to be covered over. No more secret, deep, dark, ugly places. And then every mountain and hill, that's

the high places, all those things that contribute to our pride and our self-will and self-fulfillment, ambition. Every low thing has to be covered up; every high thing has to be brought down and humbled, and every crooked thing, *scolios*, every perverse, twisted, devious, deceitful, perverted thing has to be dealt with. And the rough roads, all the debris has to come off, all other hindrances, self-love, indifference, apathy, unbelief, lust, you name it, anything on the road that might be a stumbling block to the arrival of the Messiah in your heart.

This is a complete preparation by a complete repentance. That is what John called for, a complete repentance where you deal with everything in your life, everything that's hidden down below, everything that's self-exalting, everything that's twisted and perverted, every obstacle. This is a complete repentance. And then, all flesh; this is true for everyone shall see the salvation of God. The Lord comes only to prepared hearts.

Then to put it in the language...The actual Hebrew language of Isaiah 40 verse 5, says, "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together." And, of course, the glory of the Lord is in His salvation. So, the Septuagint, the Greek version, which the one that Luke quotes here, says, "And the glory of the Lord shall be seen and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

You want to see the salvation of God, which is the glory of God? You want to see God on display in His full glory, in His full saving power? Then you're going to have to prepare your heart, you're going to have to deal with the sin that's there, you're going to have to be willing to cover up the filthy stuff down below, to pull down the self-elevating things, to straighten out what is twisted and to remove all the rest of the debris in your life. This is calling for a complete repentance and that's the only kind of heart that the King enters and brings the glory of salvation. If you want to see the glory of the Lord in His saving power, His power to forgive sin, then you have to prepare a path for Him into your heart.

That's what John said and he was consistent with all the Old Testament prophets as well. Over and over they called upon Israel to repent, to repent, to repent, to repent. John's ministry, John the Baptist then was calling people to repent of sin, all sin, every level, every kind, and to cry out to God for the same kind of forgiveness that David cried out for in Psalm 32 and Psalm 51, pleading to be delivered from all his iniquity, all his transgression, all his violations of the law of God, all his offenses against Him. And when the heart is thus prepared then the glory of God in the wonder of salvation enters.

How could you leave out repentance? How can you make repentance a non-issue? How can you talk about a gospel that doesn't mention it and a gospel that doesn't even define it? You say, well maybe that was just John. No, that wasn't just John. That was everybody before John and John, who was the last of the Old Testament prophets. More importantly, perhaps, for some it's what Jesus said in Luke 5:32, "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Look, my ministry is about one thing. I am calling sinners to repent to be forgiven. I really have nothing to offer the righteous. There's no joy in heaven over the ninety-nine righteous. And he's being sarcastic there, those who think they're righteous, who don't need repentance. "I," he said, "have not come to call the righteous." There are none. But there are some who think there are. I can't do anything for them. I have come to call sinners to repentance. This isn't about a better life, a happier life. This isn't just about going to heaven, a free ticket. This is about repentance at a deep and profound level.

In the 13th chapter of Luke you will remember very well if you were with us in that study Jesus in chapter 13 refers to a couple of incidents in Jerusalem where people were killed and he says in

verse 3, "I tell you that unless you repent you will all likewise perish." He said it again in verse 5, "I tell you unless you repent you will all likewise perish." It's his message. I've come to call sinners to repentance and if you don't repent you're going to perish. This assumes that you believe in Me and that's why you turn from sin to God. You turn, as Paul put it, from idols to serve the living and true God. It assumes faith in God. It assumes that you cry out to God for forgiveness and salvation, but from a penitent heart.

In fact, if you look at the 24th chapter of Luke, the last chapter in Luke, you have a great commission given here in verse 46. Luke 24:46 he said to them, "Thus it is written, the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day." There are the facts of the gospel: Jesus died and rose again. Verse 47: "And that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem." That's the Great Commission, to preach repentance for forgiveness. The ringing theme of all biblical evangelism is repentance, repentance, repentance. Inherent in it is a turning from sin to God. It assumes you're turning to God. It assumes faith in God in many cases, so that it becomes in itself, just the word "repentance," enough to embody saving faith as well as turning from sin.

Yes, believing that Christ died and rose again for our salvation we with repentance cry out to God on the merits and the provision of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. This is what we preach. We're not preaching a better life, a happier life, a better marriage, and all of that. There's no guarantee that life is going to be anything but filled with trouble. But it does take on a different note when you know it's temporary and heaven awaits you. But the message that we have is a message of sin and death and judgment and hell and that's what awaits every human being on the planet unless they are forgiven and they will be forgiven if they will repent. That means to turn from your transgressions, to cast away your transgressions, to turn from sin in faith to God in Christ. This is always the message.

In Acts chapter 2 verse 38, Peter; now we're into the book of Acts and we've heard Old Testament prophets preach repentance, John the Baptist, the last of them, preach repentance, and the first New Testament preacher, and Jesus preach repentance, and many times in the gospel it refers to Jesus' preaching repentance, but now we come into the preaching of the apostles. Verse 38 of Acts 2 Peter said to them, "Repent and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." Yes, you need to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, you put your trust in Him, and you demonstrate that you put your trust in Him by the outward sign of baptism, but not apart from repentance. It is that repentance that brings about the forgiveness of sin. That was Peter's message in chapter 2.

Let's hear him in chapter 3. Peter again is preaching, verse 19...well let's look at verse 18. Again, He starts with Christ, "The things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He has thus fulfilled." He's starting with the facts of the suffering of Christ and His resurrection and then the call, verse 19, "Repent therefore, and return that your sins may be wiped away." It's always about repentance and forgiveness.

The 5th chapter, verse 31, Peter again says, "We must obey God rather than men." Verse 29...Verse 30 touches on the gospel again, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you put to death by hanging Him on a cross." There's the resurrection and the cross. "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand, a Prince and a Savior to grant repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." It's always about the gospel and repentance and forgiveness.

In the 8th chapter and the 22nd verse Peter confronts Simon, the sorcerer. Therefore, verse 22, "Repent of this wickedness of yours and pray the Lord that if possible the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For, I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity." Pray, ask God to forgive you. Repent. And the 20th chapter of Acts, again the 21st verse, Paul now says, "I solemnly testify to Jews and Greeks, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

You come to the 26th chapter of the book of Acts, and it's Paul this time again. He says to King Agrippa, "I didn't prove disobedient to the heavenly vision," then in 26:20, "I kept declaring to those at Damascus first and in Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea and even to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God performing deeds appropriate to repentance," a real repentance that manifests itself in how you conduct yourself.

Remember John preached repentance and then he said, "Bring forth the fruits fitting to repentance." If you're a tax collector demonstrate the reality of your transformation by only taking what you're supposed to. If you're a soldier demonstrate the genuineness of your repentance by treating people the way you should. And if you have more than you need, demonstrate the truth of your repentance by giving a coat to someone who has none. The practical, righteous evidence of true repentance in a transformed life shows up in your behavior.

Now the pinnacle in Acts is Acts 17:30. This is the highpoint, Acts 17:30. "God," it says, "has overlooked the past times of ignorance, but God is now declaring to men that all, everywhere should repent because He's fixed the day when He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He's appointed having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." There's the element of the gospel, the death and resurrection of Christ. He becomes the judge, and if you don't repent He's going to render that judgment against you.

The Old Testament prophets preached repentance, John preached it, Jesus preached it. All the apostles preached it. God commands everywhere, that all men repent; and He's committed to us the Great Commission to preach repentance to all the nations. And now we come back to Luke 15 and we shouldn't be surprised to have salvation described as one who repents, one who repents.

I've said this many times in years past in Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe they refer to their salvation as repenting. They don't say, "I was born again, I was saved, I was converted." They say, "I repented at so and so. I came to the church and I heard the gospel and I repented. How many of you would like to repent?" That's how they describe their salvation as repentance. And that should be reintroduced to all of Christian evangelism. God grants salvation to the sinner who repents while believing the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this is what produces the joy of God. This is what makes heaven rejoice. And there will be an evidence of it. It's not a momentary thing. There will be an evidence of true repentance.

John says, "Bring forth the fruit." It'll show up in simple areas of life, how you act as a soldier, how you act as a...as a person who has goods that other people need. It'll show up in how you collect your taxes, how you deal with people financially. It'll show up in every area of your life. If you have truly repented you're a transformed person and your life will be completely changed. But it'll even be changed in your attitude toward sin and I want to show you this by having you turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 7. We have just a few minutes to consider this, 2 Corinthians chapter 7. This is so basic and so important.

Without giving you a lot of background Paul had confronted the Corinthians on some very serious sin and he responds by writing back when he hears that they had repented and that their repentance was real, and he gives us a great insight into repentance. If you look at 2 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 9, "I rejoice," he says, "Not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance."

Now he says look, this is not the sorrow of selfish sympathy, this is not the sorrow of getting caught, this is not the sorrow of an interrupted iniquity, this is not the sorrow of unrequited love, you know where your lover left you, this is not the sorrow of weak sensitivity, this is not the sorrow of sort of morbid disappointment, or the sorrow of despair, or bitterness or wounded pride, this is not the sorrow of people who try to manipulate others to feel bad for them; this is the real deal. You were made sorrowful to the point of repentance, *metanoia*, to completely thinking differently about everything. That's what it means. There's no defensiveness in this, there's no sense of victimization here, there's none of that. There's no resentment here, there's no disappointment in having to let go of sin. You were made sorry over your sin to the point of real turning, real genuine transformation.

Another way to say it is this: Verse 9, "You were made sorrowful according to God." You were made sorrowful in a godly way. That's the key, in a manner consistent with what honors God and what pleases God. To say it another way, God approved of our sorrow. It wasn't just human remorse or self-pity or disappointment, but you were genuinely sorry about your sin to the point of genuine repentance. You were sorrowful according to that which pleases God. The real deal!

In verse 10, then, he says, let me tell you what that kind of repentance looks like. Here's the definition: "The sorrow that's according to the will of God produces a repentance, first of all, without regret." It's a repentance that you never renege on. It's a repentance that you never try to get back. It's a repentance that you never ever regret. In fact you go on the rest of your entire life repenting. It's not that momentary thing where you make all kinds of statements because you feel so bad and then a few weeks later you wish you'd never said. It's...It's not a temporary commitment to God or to Christ that you then depart from in the future. It is a no-regret repentance. You never ever change your mind on that. You never think any differently than you did that day when you truly repented. You will go on through your whole life with that same penitent attitude toward your own sin.

In fact, he says, it is sorrow according to the will of God that produces a permanent repentance leading to what? Salvation. It is a saving kind of repentance. It is the repentance that ends up bringing eternal salvation. It is the kind of repentance, may I say in the words of Luke 3 and Isaiah 40 that "clears the path." And the outcome of this repentance is it is true sorrow to repentance, sorrow according to the will of God, sorrow that is permanent, never has a regret that produces salvation. It is not the sorrow of the world, which only produces death.

Look, people in the world can get so sorry and so sad about things in their life that it produces death. There are people who lose a child, or lose a spouse, and become so morose they literally die. There are spouses that lose a partner and die very soon after that out of sadness. There are people that are so sad, deep in despair, profoundly disillusioned with life, that they actually take their lives directly or indirectly, shooting themselves, jumping off a building, or...or a slow death by alcohol. The sorrow of the world: self-pity, wounded pride, unfulfilled hopes, unrequited love, guilt, shame, despair, self-pity, hopelessness, anguish, depression, resentment; all those things can produce death. It's what killed Judas.

Peter's not talking about that when he calls for true repentance. And neither is Paul. Neither is John the Baptist. They're talking about a different kind of repentance altogether. In fact, it's an amazing kind of repentance described for us in verse 11: "What earnestness, this very thing!" The first word I want you to notice is "earnestness." It means "eagerness." There is an eagerness about this repentance. It is a...It is aggressive repentance. It is...It sounds like Psalm 32, it sounds like Psalm 51, "Oh God wash me; oh God cleanse me." It's a crying from the heart that is eager and anxious, earnest. There's no indifference here. There's no complacency here. It's not an, "OK if that's what I need to do" kind of approach. It's a tremendous driving thing. You want to do right, make things right. You want to be rescued from the power and the penalty and the presence of sin. There's an eagerness. You know if you're witnessing to somebody and you're giving them the gospel and the Lord is really doing the work in their life... By the way I need to remind you it's God who grants this repentance, Acts 11:18, "God granted repentance to the Gentiles," 2 Timothy 2:25, "God grants repentance so as to believe the truth." It's not a human work. It's not something we do. It's something God does in us, not apart from our will, but it's something God does.

We're not talking about a pre-salvation human work: If you can, you know, repent on your own God will save you. We're talking about literally God giving you repentance, but not apart from your own will. But where the real thing comes, what you're asking of people is an aggressive kind of repentance. If you see some kind of reluctant repentance, "Well OK if that's what you say," and you have to put the words in their mouth, you may be pushing somebody that's not ready. There should be an earnestness in this thing.

He goes on to say, "What earnestness, this very thing!" Then he says, "This godly sorrow," this sorrow that's in the will of God has produced in you other things. "What vindication of yourself!" That is an amazing statement. A strong desire to clear your name; a strong desire to rewrite your human history; a strong desire to remove the stigma of your life, to make up for your failure, to rid yourselves of the past guilt, the past sin, to get rid of it. You...You really don't want any more of what you've been. In fact, he says, "What indignation!" This is to say "anger." There is a sense of righteous indignation at the shame that you have brought upon yourself and brought upon God and brought upon Christ. You...You hate your disloyalty to God. You hate your disobedience and your outrageous conduct.

This is the kind of repentance that saves. It's aggressive, it's eager, it's earnest and it wants so desperately to rewrite its...its own story. It wants to clear the past, remove the stigma, and it's even angry about the past and the horrible shame. And people have said to me through the years, "Why did I live in sin so long?" It should make you angry to think about it.

Then he adds, "What fear!" What does that mean? A new reverence for God. When you come... When you come with true repentance there's a new desire to honor God with a holy awe and a holy fear of God. What longing, what yearning to be what God wants you to be, to be in the fellowship of God. What zeal, what passion, what fervency for what is holy and pure and good and true. And then even "What avenging of wrong!" There's even a desire in your heart to do justice where you've done injustice. This is what moved Zaccheus to go and pay everybody back fourfold. To ma...You want to make things right. How can I fix the past? How can I go back to all the people I sinned against and sinned with and how can I make it right? This is, frankly, a massive change in a person. This is nothing superficial. It's nothing momentary. This is monumental stuff. You are changed from the core.

Ezekiel 20:43, "When you know that I am the Lord, you will remember your ways, all your deeds, with which you've defiled yourselves and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done." It is that kind of self-loathing that wants nothing more of what I used to be. Paul says I'm so glad that you had that kind of repentance. That's the real thing. That's...That's covering up the low places, pulling down the high places, straightening out the crooked, and clearing off the obstacles.

Now maybe at least we could end in Luke 15. No description of repentance is given in the first two stories. It's just that one line, "One sinner who repents." But as I read you earlier there is a description of repentance in the third story, verse 18, "I will say, 'Father, I've sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" Now that is Jesus' own description of repentance. There's not a real father here. This is a story Jesus made up. There's not a real son. There's no one who said those words except Jesus.

So if you ask Jesus: What is repentance? This is what He'll say: It's when you go to God and you say, having wasted your life in wickedness and wretchedness and wasted what opportunity you were given, "Father, I have sinned against heaven. You've seen it all. You know I'm not worthy to be your son. Just make me a servant." That's Jesus' own description of a penitent heart. Humble, broken, contrite, overwhelmed with unworthiness, sick of the past and the wasted life and pleading only for mercy and forgiveness, having confessed the sins against God.

Repentance, then, is that work of God produced by regeneration in which the sinner's very life and disposition is transformed so that he hates sin and loves righteousness, hates self and loves God, hates the world and loves heaven. It is this repentance that brings joy to God. Salvation always calls for this repentance, nothing short of it. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, again as we come to the end of our worship this morning we feel like even with all we've said we haven't said it adequately enough. What a massive and significant subject this is and how...how we grieve that it's so easy to compromise the gospel by what people don't say. Help us to be faithful to look at our own hearts to see if our repentance is the true kind and if the fruit is manifest in eagerness to live a godly life. So much so that Paul even said, "You're innocent." We know that when a person becomes a believer it's as if they have become washed and cleansed, the conscience purified and you stand there like a new creation, innocent, and the first judgment you make out of your innocency is on yourself. How could I ever have lived that way? How could I have ever dishonored God that way? I pray Lord that everyone here who has the...the notion in their mind that they have truly repented will measure their repentance against the standard of Scripture. Now we pray for those that have not repented, that You would work in their hearts and there would be an eagerness and a willingness to come to receive forgiveness, come penitently, trusting in Christ, asking for grace and mercy. In His name, amen.

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