How to Recognize True Repentance (Don Green)
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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Truth Matters 2011

I'd invite you to turn to the gospel of Matthew to start with here this afternoon. The gospel of Matthew.

As we've considered the gospel itself through Pastor John's messages and what Phil Johnson preached from Philippians 3, we could kind of summarize in one respect by saying that as ambassadors of Christ, we offer eternal life to sinners if they will come to Christ for salvation. And the question for this message that I hope to answer for you today and to consider in some measure of depth is how do we call sinners to respond to the gospel? What is the response that we are looking to provoke from them? What is it that we are praying that God would work out in their hearts as we proclaim the doctrines of grace to them, as we preach salvation to them, what is it that we as those who evangelize and those who preach, what is it that we say to them, how is it that they are to respond so that they would partake of the benefits of the work of Christ on the cross.

Well as you're going to see as we go through scriptures today, the answer to that question is this, we call them to repentance. We call them to repentance. We call them to turn from sin in order to serve Christ in newness of life. That was the call of Jesus' preaching, as you are going to see. And when Jesus commissioned Paul to preach the gospel, that was the call in Paul's preaching as well. I want to show both of those aspects to you, repentance according to Jesus and repentance according to Paul, so that you would see the perfect harmony in their gospel, the perfect harmony of response so that you and I would be doubly committed to preach the gospel in clarity and to help sinners understand what is at stake when they hear the biblical gospel.

And so, Matthew chapter 5 is where I want to begin and I just want to read the first four verses of the Beatitudes which actually begin in Matthew chapter 5 verse 3, to kind of set a context for us here this afternoon.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, or the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." That's the launch point of today's message. That passage is where I want to start.

And what I want you to see as we kind of prepare to dive into that is that when you read the gospels, you find Jesus Christ preaching repentance. That is the way that Matthew summarized Jesus'

preaching ministry in Matthew chapter 4 verse 17. Look over there with me for just a moment. Matthew chapter 4 verse 17, After His baptism, after His temptations, Jesus embarked on His public ministry. And Matthew records a summary statement of what the content of his message was. Here in verse 17 he says, “From that time on, Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.’” It’s a summary overview of what Jesus is preaching, the intent and the call of Jesus’ preaching was that as He preached the gospel, He was calling His hearers to repentance. That was the focal point of His ministry.

Now as you go over to Matthew chapter 5, Matthew chapter 6 and Matthew chapter 7, in the Sermon on the Mount, what you see in the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’ interpretation of what true repentance is. Look at the first verse with me again, verse 3, I want you to see the context and the point of contact between verse 3 and chapter 4 verse 17. Jesus had said in verse 17 of chapter 4, “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” He wanted sinners to be aware of the impending arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. And He was actually the King, the Kingdom was right there because the King was there. Then in verse 3 He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” Notice the connection. The Kingdom of Heaven in chapter 4 verse 17, the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are poor in spirit in verse 3. Jesus is starting to explain what He means by the call to repent.

And what we’re going to see as we look at the repentance according to Jesus, I want to show four aspects of it. If you’re taking notes, these would be four sub-points of repentance according to Jesus. And to just see what Jesus taught about repentance before He called Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

What do we see Jesus teaching us? Well first of all, repentance according to Jesus means this first thing, repentance includes the acknowledgement of your sin. Repentance includes the acknowledgement of your sin. We could say it this way, repentance includes an intellectual understanding, a mental comprehension that you are a sinner with personal guilt before God. You are personally guilty before god because of your personal violations of His Law. That is where repentance starts.

Look at chapter 5 verse 3 with me now, as we’re going to take these four Beatitudes one by one. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” When He says that the poor in spirit are blessed, he uses a word that means they are the privileged recipient of divine favor. God has peculiarly blessed those who recognize that they are poor in spirit, those who manifest this poverty of spirit that He describes are the privileged recipients of divine favor. And Jesus says those who are like this, theirs are…they are the ones to whom the Kingdom of Heaven belongs. And as you read this in the original language, it is emphatic that He is saying that these people and these people alone are the ones who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It belongs to them and it belongs to no one else. If you’re not poor in spirit, you will not go to heaven. That is he emphatic declaration that

Jesus gives as He begins to interpret true repentance for us.

Now when He says this term “poor,” I want you to understand that Jesus is talking about spiritual poverty here. He’s not talking about material poverty, there is no intrinsic virtue in material poverty. Jesus is talking about a spiritual dynamic which is in keeping with the summary theme of His preaching which is repent, which is a spiritual command. And what He is saying here is that when you evaluate yourself in the light of God’s Law, in the light of God’s character, when you evaluate your life in light of the person of Jesus Christ Himself, you should understand, you should quickly acknowledge that you do not deserve to be in His presence on your own merits. There is nothing in you or in me that would commend ourselves to God. As just as a…being a creature we’re not worthy of the uncreated Creator and being sinners we’re not worthy of the presence of a holy God. What He is expressing here is the idea of spiritual bankruptcy. The word “poor” is the same word that was used in a material sense to describe Lazarus when he was begging for crumbs at the rich man’s table. He had no resources of his own. Here Jesus is saying spiritually what you and I have to realize, what we have to embrace with our minds is that we have no spiritual offering to make to God that would commend us to Him. All of your efforts, all of your religion, all of your rituals do not fit you to be before a holy God. You are spiritually bankrupt and there is nothing that you can do to improve your condition. That is what Jesus is saying here. And what He says is, there are two things here that’s actually going on, one is He’s making a declaration of the reality of it, whether you admit it or not, that’s the reality of it. We’re all spiritually bankrupt. We could pool our collective two thousand spiritual resources here and we would have nothing to offer to God collectively, let alone individually. That’s the reality of it.

But what He’s driving at here is for you to embrace that, to acknowledge that from the bottom of your heart with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind, you acknowledge that I have nothing to offer myself to God. There is nothing about me to commend myself to God. That’s what he’s saying. And so this idea of repentance completely excludes any personal pride or any personal self-reliance as we approach God. We have nothing to commend ourselves to Him. We are beggars at the table of mercy with no rights to demand, no claims to call in, no chips to cash in, if you want to put it in a rather crass way. We have nothing. Repentance starts with knowing your own spiritual poverty.

But, as we go on and see what Jesus says, repentance is far more than that act of intellectual comprehension. There is more to it than just mentally agreeing with that factual statement. It starts there but it is so much more than that. And what we’re about to unfold, about to unpack is something that I think really starts to expose the poverty of the American Christian saint, the poverty of contemporary evangelicalism because it’s easy, in one sense, to get people to say, “Oh yeah, I’m a sinner,” but the second aspect of true repentance is where you start to see that we fall short, where we don’t really take this seriously…when I say “we,” I’m talking about the professing Christian church in general as well as us individually.

Because, secondly, repentance not only includes the acknowledgement of your sin, repentance, second sub-point here, repentance includes sorrow over your sin. It includes sorrow over your sin. And when I say sorrow, what I mean is that emotionally you grieve over your sin when you're truly repentant, you grieve over it.

Look at verse 4, where Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." This word for mourning describes deep, inner agony…agony. Jesus is describing a spiritual mourning here, not an earthly mourning. It's easy enough to see that. There are a lot of people that suffer earthly loss and mourn that, that don't receive comfort from Christ. Unbelievers who are mourning their losses don't receive comfort from Christ. What Jesus is talking about here is spiritual mourning over sin. He had just talked about poverty of spirit. It's in the context of repentance.

In verse 6 He talks about hungering and thirsting for righteousness. The whole mourning that He's talking about is our lack of personal righteousness, our violations of His righteousness. That's what we're mourning over. And when you understand this aspect of repentance, what you need to see is that truly repentant people are not flippant about their sin. Truly repentant people don't find entertainment and joy out of watching other people sin in movies and that kind of stuff. The hatred of sin, the sorrow over sin precludes that kind of interaction with it. And we don't joke about our sin if we're repentant because we're so grieved about it. We take it seriously. It breaks our hearts. It pierces us to the core when we're truly repentant.

Phil in his message alluded to the tax collector in Luke 18, verse 13…Luke 18, verse 13, you don't need to turn there. The tax collector standing some distance away was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breasts saying, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner." He was beating his breast, his agony, his mourning over sin was so great that he had to release it physically. This was no superficial response. This was no quick nod of the head to the question, "Do you think you're a sinner?" And then move on to whatever the next topic of discussion was. No, the kind of mourning, the kind of sorrow that repentance expresses is a sorrow that stops you in your tracks, a sorrow that you can't get over.

Let me ask you a question. How much do you hate your sin? Repentance, and especially in our American culture, I don't know about the other eighteen countries that are represented here, but in our American culture, this needs to be said, "Repentance is not measured…the seriousness or the quality of your repentance is not measured by your opposition to the sins of society, like abortion or homosexuality. That is not a mark of true repentance at all. It's good to be opposed to those things, those things are contrary to righteousness but it has nothing to do with your personal repentance, your attitude towards that because the mark of your personal repentance is the way that you grieve over your sin. That is the mark of repentance. And I fear that the strong opposition that you see in the Christian church sometimes to the opposition of society sends comes at the expense of real personal

concern about our own sins. And that needs to be said.

Jesus isn't calling you to mourn over someone else's sin. He's calling you to mourn over your sin. If you're repentant, your sorrow and your grief and your agony is over the fact that you yourself fall short of the glory of God. That's what repentance does.

Now, thirdly, going through this rather quickly, I know, Jesus said that repentance includes an acknowledgement of your sin, that understanding of your sin moves your heart to grieve over your sad spiritual condition. It makes you broken over your prior rebellion to God. But Jesus went even further than that. When you really study the doctrine of repentance, you understand how far down it drills deep into your soul. Jesus went beyond this intellectual and emotional reaction against sin and taught us that repentance goes to your very will. It goes to your very volition. This is the third sub-point here, repentance turns away from your sin. Repentance turns away from your sin. It's not enough to know that you're a sinner. It's not enough to grieve over your sin. The point of repentance is that you would grieve over it to the point that you turn away from it, that you decisively, consciously break from it and turn away from it and say, "That is unacceptable in my life."

So on a volitional level, you turn from sin in order to serve God. Look at verses 5 and 6 of Matthew chapter 5 here. Remember, Jesus is expanding on, He's expounding on what He meant when He said, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." In verse 5 He says, "Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth." Verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Repentance changes your entire orientation. Repentance changes a man from a proud, boastful, arrogant, self-willed man into a humble, meek man who is happy to defer to others. Spiritual mourning produces an unquenchable desire for holiness. Instead of pursuing, desiring after sin, you see here that the whole will has been reoriented in repentance because Jesus pronounces blessing on those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They hunger and thirst for that which they don't have. And the words that He uses there of the simple, physical, bodily needs of hunger and thirst, He takes them from the physical realm and applies them to the spiritual realm to show us that the repentant person is someone who wants righteousness to mark his life. He realizes that he lacks it. He understands that he doesn't have it and so he looks outside himself for righteousness and he wants to manifest practical righteousness in his own life.

Jesus called for that kind of change with the rich young ruler in Luke chapter 18. Luke 18 verse 22, He said, "One thing that you still lack," speaking to that person that was in front of Him, He said, "Here's what you lack, sow all that you possess, distribute it to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come follow Me." He was calling for a total reorientation of that man's life. From the materialistic pursuit of his riches, Jesus says, "You have to abandon that and come after Me." Do you want righteousness that much?

And what you should see from that example is that the call to repent comes from Christ as an imperative. It's a command that goes out to all men everywhere, repent. He called the rich young man to abandon his earthly priorities and follow Christ. Everything that he treasured, all that he loved, all of his priorities. Jesus says, "You've got to cast all of that aside, you've got to leave it behind and come follow Me.

Stated differently, true repentance affects the whole inner man. We turn from sin, decisively, consciously, totally, without qualification, without reservation, with no mental reservations about what we might hang on to, just that one particular sin and I'll repent of the other ninety-nine percent. No…No. Repentance is a total turning of the inner man from sin to walk with God in the ways of His Word. And, beloved, I have to tell you that a man or a woman who refuses their will to Christ is not repentant at all, no matter how sorrowful they may be about the consequences of their sin. Until there is a turning of your will, you are not repentant which is another way of saying, "Until your will has been given to Christ, you are not a Christian." It's that stark, it's that clear.

Let me put it to you this way. True repentance…true repentance wants more than deliverance from hell. True repentance wants more than deliverance from eternal damnation. You don't have to be a Christian to not want to go to hell. There's nothing uniquely spiritual, or uniquely biblical about that desire. Who wants to go to hell, given the alternative, you know? No, true repentance, true repentance wants to be delivered from sin. True repentance wants to be delivered from the pollution and power of sin in addition to being delivered from the penalty of sin. True repentance hates sin and desires righteousness. There's a whole reorientation of the inner man in true repentance. True repentance wants to have Christ and His righteousness and is willing to forsake and abandon it all in order to gain Him.

Someone may object at this point. "How do I know that you're not preaching salvation by works when you say this?" Well let me clarify that and just clarify the nature of repentance, hopefully, in the process. When we talk about repentance, we are not talking about a pre-salvation effort to get your life in order. You can't do that. You can't fix it. It's broken. Humpty-Dumpty has fallen off the wall and you can't put it back together again. No, repentance is an internal response to the work of God. It earns no merit to our account. The whole premise of Jesus' teaching in the Beatitudes is that you're poor in spirit, that you're spiritually bankrupt, you acknowledge you have nothing to commend yourself to God. True repentance couldn't possibly be a matter of someone coming and saying, "I bring my repentance to you, God, therefore you owe me salvation." That is appalling to the repentant mind. In fact, the Bible says that repentance is a gift from God. Acts chapter 11 verse 18, Acts 11:18 if you're jotting down the Scripture references, says, "That God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life." God gave them that. He granted it to them.

Second Timothy 2 verse 25, Paul says, "We are to, with gentleness, correct those who are in opposition if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." They

need a work of God in their heart in order to repent. God gets the glory that way. And when God is calling a sinner into His Kingdom, when He is calling your heart to come to Christ and you have that internal compulsion born out of the work of the Holy Spirit, God has awakened your heart to Christ, the sinner gladly repents in order to receive Him. And if it is a gift from God, then it is not a work in which man can boast. Repentance is the acknowledgement of our unworthiness, not an assertion of it.

But there's more, as you continue to read the gospel of Matthew. There's an intellectual dimension to repentance. You acknowledge your sin. There's an emotional dimension to repentance, it grieves you. It grieves you because of your sin, not someone else's. There's a volitional dimension to sin, you turn from it in order to turn to Christ, to serve Him, to receive Him.

But there's this fourth aspect of repentance, according to Jesus, which is just astonishing. And we'll spend a little bit more time here. I couldn't come up with a great way to state this point that was pithy. So let me just state it this way. Repentance transfers your heart allegiance to Christ. Repentance transfers your heart allegiance to Christ and you could just view this as an aspect of the volitional thing, the volitional aspect of repentance. But I think it bears a particular emphasis in light of what you read as you go through the gospels. Jesus' call to repentance demands . . . it requires the sinner to transfer his ultimate heart allegiance . . . his final heart allegiance to Christ. Jesus said in Matthew 22, "What is the greatest commandment?"

"To love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind." There is a total turning over of your heart allegiance to the person of Jesus Christ. And without that, true repentance has not occurred. You must not only turn from sin in the negative sense, in a positive sense, true repentance turns from sin and it follows Christ. Irreversibly saying, "I am going to follow Christ, henceforth from this moment on, without qualification, without reservation, with all of my heart, Lord Jesus, I give You my allegiance. I surrender to You as my Lord. With no mental reservations, my life now belongs to You.

"You want a blank check, here's a blank check. I'll sign it, you fill in the amount." Stated differently, you cannot repent and keep any of the desires of your unregenerate heart…the desires of your unregenerate heart. They all have to be laid down at the feet of Christ. Turn over to Matthew chapter 10 where you can see Jesus saying this so clearly. Matthew chapter 10 and verse 37, I'm happy to hear those Bible pages turning. Notice the call to preeminent love that Christ requires. He says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it. And he who has lost his life for my sake will find it."

In the utter center of your heart it should be, it must be if you're a Christian, it must be settled that there is nothing on earth that approaches your love for Christ. There is nothing that competes with the final affections of your heart. If it's a matter of choosing between Christ and life, you gladly bear the wounds of a martyr. If the matter of a family relationship, competing with your love for Christ while we don't seek to turn people away from us in our human love, if they say, if they come and say, 'It's me or Christ,' you get up and say, 'Here, let me get the door for you as my final act of kindness to You because I will not turn from Christ.'"

I remember and I thank God for the moment when that was clear in my own life, early on, very early on in my conversion. My father who was a dominating kind of man, who ruled with a bit of an iron fist, I say that in love and in kind remembrance of his memory, he did not like the fact that I had become a Christian. I became a Christian in my early twenties and he sat me down one day, he was used to getting his way in everything, and he sat me down one day and he said…he said, "Listen," he said, "Look, I'm glad that you're real religious." He had seen the testimony of my life over a few weeks or months of my conversion. He said, "Look, I'm glad you're real religious, but you're taking this too far and I want it to stop." That's like getting an order from a sergeant with the way, you know, he did things. And I just thanked God that the Holy Spirit gave me the presence of mind at that time to say, "Dad, no...no...no. Jesus Christ has changed my life and I am not going back." It was not a premeditated response, but it was the mark, it was a sign of the true nature of my conversion. If he was going to take…tell me that I had to choose between him and Christ, there was no contest. That's what Jesus says. You can't love father or mother more than Me, or you're not worthy of Me. Jesus doesn't take second place. You give Him first place or you walk away from Him. But don't insult the Holy Son of God with the sense that you'll add Him to your other desires and He'll fit in the mix some place. Christ gets the preeminent affection, or you don't get Christ.

This is universal. This is what Jesus says to all men. Jesus confronts every human heart, leave your life behind to follow Me or you will die in your sins. Turn over to the gospel of Luke, I want to show you a couple of passages there. Luke chapter 13 in verse 3, I like for people to see the scriptures with their own eyes and not just quote them all the time without having you turn there. I want you to see this in your own Bible. I want you to see that I'm not making this up. Luke 13 verse 3, Jesus says, "I tell you, no but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Without exception. If you don't repent, you will perish, you will die in your sin.

Well in the context of the totality of what Jesus has taught on repentance and the call to Himself, you can see how stark the call of the gospel is. A true presentation of the gospel leaves people with no alternatives. And they should walk away from the gospel understanding that look, it's either Christ or I die in perdition. There's no alternative, there's no third door here. And the call that Jesus makes to repentance is that you leave your whole life behind. By which He means your whole affections, everything that you loved before is not subordinated to Christ.

Turn over a page or two to Luke 14 verse 26. Actually we'll look at verse 25 just briefly. Luke 14 verse 25, "Now large crowds were going along with Him and He turned and said to them, large crowds, a mixture of people, indiscriminately He says to them, 'If anyone…if anyone,'" this is a universal statement. "'If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.'" He says, "In comparison to your love and allegiance for Me, everything else has to be subordinated to such a degree that it seems like hatred by comparison." Verse 27, "Who does not like…whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." Jesus was calling for an unconditional transfer of your heart allegiance, from whatever it was that you loved, to Him. And He put all of the things that we tend to love the most, the possessions with the rich young ruler, father, mother, houses, farms, our own life, our own priorities, He says you've got to hate all of that by comparison to Me or you can't be My disciple.

You turn from self, you turn from sin to Christ. You love Him more than life itself. You place no limits on your future obedience, that is repentance.

So let me say this. We get it all wrong, we get it all seriously wrong, we seriously distort the gospel beyond recognition, we disfigure it when we tell people as if this were the final word on the gospel that they need to accept Christ as their personal Savior. If that's all that you say to someone, you have not explained the gospel to them at all. There's nothing in that that helps the sinner understand what the price of the gospel is. The sinner needs to understand that his great concern is for Christ to accept him. And so you come as a beggar, not as the one who is in control and deciding, "Christ, I'll accept You." It makes me nauseous just to describe that, let alone to think it. No, we come before the sovereign Lord of the universe. We come as beggars, we come as those asking for mercy, not for one as though we're extending our approval to Him. That's repulsive.

Now someone else may object at this point, with a legitimate question, a clarifying question. "Say, Don, you've been talking all along about repentance. What about the Philippian jailer? 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved.' Where's repentance in that?" Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "You're saved by grace through faith, that not of yourselves." Yes, of course. But in those simplified, and I've seen, you know, and you have too, you've seen people who write and they just want to restrict the totality of the gospel, to one or two verses, as if there weren't 259 other chapters in the Bible, or in the New Testament. And they want to subordinate the totality of Revelation to one or two favorite verses that fit their theology and discard all the uncomfortable things that would contradict their weak theology.

What is too often obscured and the reason we need to elevate repentance in our thinking and elevate repentance in our proclamation is that the biblical picture of saving faith is that saving faith is a repentant faith. The jailer, when you read Acts 16, the jailer was at the end of himself. He was ready

to commit suicide. He was at the end of himself. And that passage goes on says that they explained the Word of God to him. You can't narrow it down to two words in one verse and say, "This is the totality of the gospel." That's an insult to serious Bible interpretation.

What the sinner needs to understand is that there are no promises of salvation to unrepentant people. Paul said in Romans 2 that you're stubborn and unrepentant heart is storing up wrath for yourself.

And so, unless someone manifests these characteristics of repentance as Jesus described them, this intellectual, emotional, volitional response to sin, this transfer of heart allegiance to Christ, they have no grounds for assurance of salvation if they're consciously aware of aspects of that, that they just totally reject. This is true repentance by the words of Jesus.

So what is the relationship then between repentance and faith? Repentance, you could say, turns from sin in the ways that we've been describing here. Faith which is the other side of the coin, heads and tails of one single coin, faith receives Christ and rests upon Him alone for salvation. Repentance and faith are interdependent. You cannot have true repentance without true faith, or vice-versa. You turn from sin because you hate it for its own intrinsic evil. You turn to Christ for salvation because only He can deliver you from sin. If you're turning from something, you've got to turn to something. That's the idea. Saving faith is a repentant faith. Without repentance, there is no salvation. Repentance, stated differently, turns from sin and by faith entrust in the promises of the gospel, asks God for mercy based on the promise of eternal life in the gospel. "God, I hear Your Word. I hear the offer of salvation in the gospel. I trust You to be faithful to Your Word. I come to You and I submit my heart to You. Please save me from this horror that is within me, that Your Word calls sin." That's repentance.

How thorough was Jesus' commitment to repentance? Look at Luke 24, how elevated was the theme of true repentance in the mind of Christ?

Well in Luke chapter 24 verse 47, Luke's version of the Great Commission. Luke chapter 24 verse 47, He says, "Jesus said to the Apostles before He ascended to heaven," He said, "Repentance for forgiveness of sins shall be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." That was after in verse 45, He opened their minds to understand the scriptures. He sent them out to preach repentance.

In His final words before…His almost final words before He ascended into heaven, that was His commission, that was His charge to the Apostles. And so what I want you to see from that is this. Matthew chapter 4, at the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus says, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

At the end of His public ministry, after His death and resurrection, before He goes to heaven, He sends the Apostles out and says, "You go preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins." He ended

up where He started. It's like bookends to His ministry and everything else undergirds the call to sinners to repent in the proclamation of the gospel. Jesus called men to repent and follow Him, and that is the message that He entrusted to the Apostles and that is the message that we still have today. We're under obligation to tell sinners that they must repent and turn to Christ. And not offer them a watered-down gospel that won't save them.

Now someone may object at this point. You'll see this from those who deny that repentance is a part of the gospel message. "If repentance is so important," they say, "why doesn't the gospel of John mention it? He says in John chapter 20 verse 31 that these things have been written in order that you may believe and have eternal life."

If it's so important, why didn't He mention repentance and they close their Bible and slap their hands and they think it's all over. The argument is done. That's their silver bullet in the discussion. It's more like instead of a silver bullet, it's more like sawdust. There's no power in that argument at all, if you look at it at all. The gospel of John doesn't use the word repentance. But throughout the gospel, he expresses the concept of repentance. He says that true believers must obey the Son, they must honor God, they must love God, they must keep Jesus' commandments. Sinners do none of that.

And so there's obviously a call to conversion that is implicit in what John is saying. And John wrote his gospel decades after Matthew, Mark and Luke had written theirs, the principle of repentance was already stated and established. And so he's just bringing out the other side of conversion with his gospel. They form a perfect harmony that shows the glory of salvation as Jesus presented it. You better be careful with what you do with that argument about the gospel of John, because in the four gospels, the four gospel writers do not quote Jesus as using the word grace. Did Jesus because He didn't use the word grace deny salvation by grace? Was He teaching salvation by works because He didn't use the word grace? It's foolishness. It's foolishness to pit Scripture against Scripture that way, to elevate one chapter, one verse, one book against all the others. Let's read the whole Bible and see what the whole Bible says.

Now can I call a time out? Of course I can. You may not grant it, but I'm going to call a time out here. I want to put my pastor's hat on for just a moment. I know and understand that most of you are here because you love God's Word. You're here because you have repented and believed in Christ. That's why you love the ministry of Grace To You, that's what brought you here is the love for God's Word which is the mark of a regenerate heart, someone who has truly come to salvation. But do a little bit of math with me.

If ninety-five percent of you in this room right now are all true Christians, that means that over a hundred of you are not. And if you died tonight, Jesus would turn you away. Maybe you've believed that false gospel, you've relied on that superficial gospel and there hasn't been any real meaningful life transformation to you.

Look, I wouldn't be a faithful pastor if I didn't call something to your attention. Turn back to the gospel of Matthew with me to a familiar passage, Matthew chapter 7. Matthew 7 verse 21, and I'm saying this to help you, beloved. I'm saying this as an ambassador of Christ, pleading for the health of your soul, pleading for you to be reconciled to God, that five percent of you. Percentage may be higher, I don't know, God knows. But I'm not going to take anything for granted at this time.

Jesus said that there would be a large portion of humanity surprised at the Day of Judgment that they're not going to heaven. In fact, if you go up to chapter 7 verse 13, He says, "Enter through the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction and there are many who enter through it." If He was trying to describe the modern gospel that is presented to so many people, He couldn't have described it more accurately. When people try to make the gospel so easy, what are they doing except saying, "Hey, the road is broad, everybody come in." Jesus said, "The way is narrow and when you understand the doctrine of repentance, Jesus is teaching on repentance, you understand why it's narrow because you have to leave everything behind in order to walk through a narrow-type turnstile. You can't go through carrying your luggage, you have to leave it all behind if you want to walk through that turnstile into eternal life. That turnstile was repentance. And Jesus says, He says that there's going to be so many people who don't pay attention to My Word there. Verse 21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven. But he who does the will of My Father who is heaven will enter." You know the passage.

Look at verse 22. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'" Hey, we're calling You Lord. And look at all this stuff we've done. How could You possibly turn us away?'"

Well the answer is that they never repented. Look what He says in verse 23, "Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

And, beloved, those men had never repented and were so self-deceived that they're shocked on the Day of Judgment to find that Christ is not receiving them into His Kingdom. Shocked. And the fact that they were marked by a practice of lawlessness shows that they had never changed their orientation from sin to Christ. Christ says, "I never knew you." He wouldn't say that to someone who had truly repented, like we talked about here today. And so, beloved, I have to ask you in light of the words of Christ, have you repented like this? Do you know something of what it is like to recognize the vileness of your old man and to turn from it and to hate it and want to embrace Christ without condition with all of your heart? That's true repentance. And without it, there is no salvation.

And so, I just have to invite you, I have to call you to turn to Christ and be saved. Turn to Him. You see, you have to come out of your former life. You have to come out of your false religion. You have to come out of your pride. You have to come out of the sin that you love. You have to leave it all

behind and come alone to Christ. That's the call to repentance.

And so, if you're one of those five percent, just picking a number, I'm just making it up, God orchestrated this whole…you should view it this way, God orchestrated this entire conference for you to hear the gospel with clarity and to repent and to be saved. And if you come to judgment apart from Christ, how much will you be without excuse?

But O, beloved, to those of you who have repented, rejoice in the gospel, rejoice in the fact that God has worked in your life in this way, if you're repentant like that, it's a mark that God has done a sovereign work in your heart and He has shown mercy on you by name. Individually Paul said, "Christ died for me and gave Himself up for me," first person singular. He died for me.

Well, we spent so much time looking at the repentance according to Jesus that I'm going to have to pinch the time on repentance according to Paul, which is the whole point of this conference. Do me a favor, don't tell Pastor John about this, okay? We'll just…keep this to ourselves.

I want you to see real quickly that Paul himself preached this same kind of repentance. Turn to the book of Acts and keep your fingers limbered up because we've got to move here. Acts chapter 14, sometimes people wondered, did Jesus and Paul preach the same gospel? What a foolish question. But in this aspect of it, in the consistency of their call and approach to repentance, you're going to see that, of course, they did. Acts chapter 14 verse 15, we're going to just read these scriptures.

"Paul ran out to these men and said, 'Men, why are you doing these things?'" They wanted to offer sacrifices to the speakers. "Men, why are you doing these things? We are men who have the same nature as you and we preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God who made the heaven and the earth and all that is in them." I'm preaching the gospel and I'm telling you to turn from your idolatry to the true God.

Acts chapter 17, verse 30, Paul says that having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent because He's fixed a day in which He shall judge the world in righteousness.

Acts chapter 20, verses 20 and 21…Acts 20, verses 20 and 21, Paul says, "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Repentance, repentance, repentance.

Now you see him discussing repentance in his epistles. It's not as prominent a theme in his epistles because he's writing to Christians, he's writing to churches. So he's writing to people who had already embraced repentance and had repented and were now seeking to live the Christian life. And so it

wasn't the same emphasis that was needed when he was doing evangelistic work. There was a different kind of work that was needed now in his writings. But still you see those same four elements of Christ's teaching in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

Now just stay with me here, we'll go through them real quickly. First of all, Paul taught the acknowledgement of sin. Paul taught that all men should acknowledge and recognize their sin, Romans chapter 3 and verse 9, I'll just read it to you. He said, "We have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin. As it is written, there is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands. There is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they've become useless. There is none who does good, there is not even one." Verse 23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

What is that except a universal nature of sin and the fact that men have to acknowledge that. Paul's writings inform our conscience, informs our understanding that we are all sinners by nature and by deed. All understand, spiritually bankrupt, that's the same thing Jesus taught, isn't it? There is no space between the two.

Secondly, Paul taught sorrow over sin. He taught this emotional reaction against sin. Just jot down this reference, I won't have you turn there again just to save time. Second Corinthians chapter 7…2 Corinthians chapter 7, the Apostle Paul looking back on the conversion of the Corinthians says, "I know rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, near remorse is not enough, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance, for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God." Verse 10, "The sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret." Same thing Jesus said. True repentance sorrow leads to a volitional turning away from sin. But there's this sorrow over it. That is the spiritual mourning that Jesus taught. It…It…It disturbs the repentant person that he sinned and violated God's glory, that unclean thoughts have permeated his thoughts. Unclean words have come out of his lips. Unclean deeds have been done by his hands. It grieves him. He doesn't call a truce with it, it grieves him.

Now, thirdly, Paul taught the turning from sin. Paul taught the turning from sin. He taught the knowledge of sin, the sorrow over sin, and he taught the turning over sin. In Acts chapter 26 he makes this so very explicit. Acts chapter 26 and verse 15, the Lord said to him, "I'm Jesus whom you are persecuting. Get up and stand on your feet, I'm appointing you a minister to the things which you have seen, and also the things in which I will appear to you."

Verse 18, Jesus is giving him the content of the call. "To Jews and to Gentiles, I'm rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles I'm sending you." Verse 18, "To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me." In verse 20 he says, "I went out and preached and they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds

appropriate to repentance." That volitional call turned from sin, pursue Christ and His righteousness.

Now, fourthly, Paul taught this heart allegiance to Christ. He taught this heart allegiance to Christ in a very striking stunning way. Pastor John alluded to it, I believe, last night. In 1 Corinthians 16 verse 22, "This heart allegiance," Paul says, "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed." There are accursed people and there are those who love Christ, there is no other group. That's the mark of true repentance. Paul showed it from the positive side in Philippians 3:7, as Phil preached on earlier. "Consider my former life to be refuse for the sake of gaining Christ." Total heart allegiance to Christ. Christ was the centerpiece of Paul's heart. Repentance means that the old man dies and he dies gladly. The new man loves Christ without limit and would never go back.

I've told people in the past. If the old Don Green ever showed up and I saw him, I would take a ball bat to him. I would beat him to death. I hate him that much. I would kill him. Thankfully Christ killed him for me.

Well where does that leave us as we walk out this afternoon? Repentance in you, that's the third main point. I just want to give you a couple of things to just walk out of here with and apply it to your life. I'm speaking to the believers now. One of the challenges of preaching on repentance is that the preacher has to make care where he leaves his audience. The whole point of this is to build you up, not tear you down. But the nature of repentance and teaching on repentance is so introspective that it's kind of heavy.

I want you to remember this. True repentance is a turning from self to Christ. If you're repentant, you have Christ. You have God over all most blessed forever, as the one who owns you and directs your life, and owns you and will bring you into heaven. Christ belongs to you and you belong to Him. That's the whole point is to leave the old man behind for Him. The glory of belonging to Him through true repentance should elevate your heart and cause you to rejoice. So you rejoice.

Secondly, I would encourage you to recommit yourself to this true gospel. Don't be intimidated by the tolerance of our post-modern age. Understand and embrace the fact that the gospel is a direct confrontation with the spirit of our age. We go out and preach the gospel and we tell men everywhere, your life is not acceptable to God. You must leave it behind and come to Christ or you will die in your sins. Don't be afraid of that. Embrace it. It's the gospel that saved you, right? If it's the gospel that saved you, it's the gospel that's going to save someone else. And you can't back off on it and still be faithful to the one who saved you. Just commit it in your heart, just settle it in your heart right now. The next evangelistic opportunity I have, I'm going to call that person to repentance and let God deal with their heart. Because a call to repentance stands out with power in times like these where everybody just wants to get along and tolerate one another.

Thirdly, to say this, if you're here as a believer, this whole teaching on repentance should make you examine yourself and repent of any lingering sin in your own life. Those rotten attitudes, the broken relationships, the other things that we fall into. Understand that if Christ calls sinners to repent, how much more appropriate is for you and me as His people to repent of our sins? If it's inappropriate for a sinner to live in sin, how much more inappropriate is it for us that belong to Christ, to have any known conscious sin tolerated within our midst?

Charles Spurgeon said, "A Christian must never quit repenting for I fear that he never quits sinning." No, beloved, repentance opens the door to grace. Let me finish with this passage from Paul in 1 Timothy. Paul in his first letter to Timothy expresses the fruit and the grace and the gratitude that marks the repentant heart. He says, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord," 1 Timothy 1:12, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me because He considered me faithful, putting me into service. Even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor, yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief. The grace of our Lord was more than abundant with the faith and love found in Christ Jesus. It's a trustworthy statement, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners among whom I am foremost. And yet I found mercy so that Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience to me as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."

Beloved, that is where we walk out this evening as repentant believers in Christ. We walk out in the themes of grace and mercy and faith and forgiveness of sin and hope of eternal life. We have not repented in vain. Christ has bestowed such abundant mercy on us and He will never fail us, He will truly bring us into heaven. And we will then begin to see the unfolding of God's eternal grace in our eyes. So we're repentant and we confess our utter bankruptcy before God and yet in Christ we are lost in wonder, love and praise to Him. Bow with me in prayer.

Paul went on to say, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever."

Father, seal Your Word to our hearts for Your eternal glory, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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