

REPENT, OR MISS THE KINGDOM!

I want to spend some time this morning looking at a subject brought up in our reading of Matthew this week and was the subject of one the questions in our class a little while ago. I want to look at what the scriptures call *repentance*. It is important for us to do that because if you haven't repented, and if even now, as a believer, you are not a penitent believer, to paraphrase the words of John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2, you have missed, or you are going to miss the kingdom of God, or heaven.

Tonight, the Lord willing, we will be looking at the subject of joy, and really, these two subjects—repentance and joy—are not unrelated. There is a very real connection between the two. This evening, I am going to be raising the question of whether or not you have joy. I will tell you, that is not the same thing as asking if you are happy. Happiness has to do with what's happening at the present moment, and so that comes and goes, but joy is something far more enduring and fundamental to our well-being, and our happiness. So come back at 5 this evening, and we will look at the subject of joy.

I know many of you have undoubtedly heard many lessons on repentance. You know that repentance is one of the critical, fundamental things that God calls upon us to do. If you did the reading this week in our study of Matthew—Part 1 of *The Greatest Story Ever Told*—then you undoubtedly noticed that this was mentioned not just once, but three times.

The first time, there in **3:2**, we read about where John the Baptist, beginning his ministry, which was to herald the coming of Christ and the Kingdom that Christ was coming to begin, preached, "*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" In other words, the kingdom that had been prophesied by many of the OT prophets, including Isaiah and Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah, it was now about to begin. BUT, John was saying, if you expect, or hope to be a part of that kingdom, the first thing you must do is repent. Now, I want you to keep in mind who John is preaching to. Verse 5 says that the people of Jerusalem, and Judea and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to John. In other words, these were people who already thought of themselves as God's favored people. For them, all of the prophetic talk about the kingdom wasn't referring to something new. They simply thought all of that as simply referring to the renewal of the independence and greatness of their nation. They were looking for their greatness to be "restored." John's words about "kingdom at hand" and repentance probably didn't make a whole lot of sense to them. The context seems to make it clear that many of these people were coming just for the baptism experience. They were hearing about that, and seeing that, and after all, many of them believed John was indeed a prophet, so they wanted to have that experience. So here they come!

And that is where the second instance comes where this word was used in our reading for this week. Beginning in **verse 7**:

"But when he [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers!' Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

John seems to have been saying that true repentance always manifests itself in certain ways. He calls it "*the fruit of repentance.*" When one repents, there are certain signs one can look for.

And then the third instance, in this week's reading, is in **4:17** where we find Jesus, following His baptism and time in the wilderness, after going 40 days without eating and being tempted by the devil, He returned to Galilee and began preaching. Matthew wants us to know that this was in keeping with the prophecy Isaiah had given some seven hundred years before. You can go look at [Isaiah 9](#) if you want to take a closer look at that. But notice, Jesus' message was the same as John's. "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*"

Now, I'm sure you read those passages, or have read them, but I want you to notice something that it is good not to miss while reading through this passage. I am sure you recall earlier in the **4th chapter**, when Jesus was being tempted by the devil, that there in the wilderness, after going for 40 days without eating, the devil said to Jesus, "*If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.*" John had said, God could turn stones into children for Abraham. The devil says, "*Turn these stones into bread.*" And what did Jesus say? He said, "*It is written*"—quoting from **Deuteronomy 8**—"*Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*"

How important do you think it is for us to pay attention to the words God uses to speak to us? Jesus said they are a matter of life and death. Well, this morning we are looking at one of those words; it is the word repent. Well, how important is that? Over in **chapter 11, verse 20**, Matthew tells us that Jesus "*...began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.*" My friends, do you want God to denounce you? Do you want Him calling you out, calling you out for the things you have done, or said, or thought? We wouldn't like that, would we? So we had better do what those cities didn't do where most of his mighty works had been done!

On another occasion, in **Luke 13**, we read about a time when Jesus said to some people to repent or perish. Some people had come to Jesus and were telling Him about some Galileans—Jesus and most of His disciples were from Galilee—whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. That is, while in the Temple, Roman soldiers came in and killed those men, desecrating the altar and temple with their blood. Horrible scene; it would be headline news today. Jesus said, "*Do you think those Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans?*" No, no! He says, "*but unless you repent, you are going to likewise perish.*"

And then Jesus gave another example; not just this one of the Galileans there in the Temple. He said, probably referring to something that had happened just recently, "*Those eighteen on*

whom the town in Siloam fell.” He said, “Do you think that they were the worst offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem?” Oh no! He says, but unless you repent you are going to likewise perish.”

So do you get the idea that repentance may be important, maybe even critical?

- Isn't it interesting, in Luke version of the great commission, in **Luke 14:47**, Jesus said, *“Repentance and remission of sins was to be preached in My name to all the nations.”*
- And of course, we know from **Acts 2:38 and 3:19**, that is exactly what the apostles did. They commanded people to *“repent and be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins.”*
- In **Acts 17:30** Paul said that God was *commanding all men, everywhere to repent*. Well that would catch just about everyone wouldn't it? All men? Everywhere?
- Peter tells us in **2 Peter 3:9** in connection with a point that he was trying to make about those who are mocking the Christian faith because Christ had said He was coming back, but He hadn't shown up yet! And that was in Peter's day. Imagine what those same scoffers would have to say today! But in response to their mocking the idea of Christ's failure to come back, He said, God is being patient, longsuffering, to give more men the opportunity to be saved. Peter says, God does not want *“...anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance.”*

So, we can see that whatever repentance is, it is something very important, very necessary, even critical to our being pleasing to our God. So just exactly, what is repentance?

We know the word repentance comes from a Greek word that has the literal meaning of “change of mind.” This is clear from a number of times in the OT where the word is used. For example, in **Psalms 110:4**, it says, *“The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.”* In other words, God has sworn that he would do this, raise up a priest after the order of Melchizedek, referring to Christ of course, and He wasn't going to change His mind about that. It was a sealed deal! The KJV uses the word, repent, God would not repent. A number of the newer versions use the phrase, *“Change His mind.”*

So the essential thought involved with the word repentance is that of a change of mind. But let's not leave that alone. What are we talking about, a change of mind? We probably all change our minds, every day. Does that mean we have repented? No, that isn't what we mean. Repentance is a change of mind with regard to something we have been doing when that has been contrary to the will of God, dishonoring to Him, or hurtful to others. Maybe it is something that even becomes our mindset, our persistent way of thinking, or acting.

For example, take a husband who has developed a habit of being unkind to his wife, of being selfish and unthoughtful of her feelings. He has been that way for so long, he doesn't even think of it as a problem anymore, certainly not a sin, or anything he needs to change.

Or what about the ways we let our tongues go, using profanity and foul language. You know, that's the kind of thing that people do that very quickly they even lose sight of the fact that they are doing it. They aren't even aware of it and they certainly don't think of it as something God might condemn them for.

A lot of Christians, like the Laodiceans mentioned in Revelation 3, have become lukewarm. They have lost their passion and their zeal for the Lord and His work. They barely make it to worship now and then. Never make it to Bible study, and in fact, spend very little time reading God's word. The danger of lukewarmness is that people do not see it for what it is. They think, as **Revelation 3:17** says, that they are doing okay, and they don't need anything. They don't see their wretched, poor, pitiable and naked condition. **Verse 19**, God says: *"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent."*

You see, repentance is serious business. When you repent, you have done something. It isn't just a change of mind; it is a change that goes all the way down in your heart and soul. You change! You don't just change your mind, or change a few actions here and there; you change from the inside out.

Many of you, I am sure have had this experience. Your children are misbehaving, and doing things they shouldn't be doing. Maybe they get into a fight. Johnny comes running to you, "Billy broke my airplane." You call Billy to come here! You say, "Billy, did you break Johnny's airplane?" "Well, he broke my airplane first!" "Johnny, is that true? Yes, but I didn't mean to." And you get into this whole rigmarole about who did what and why. So you say, "Well Billy, you tell your brother that you're sorry and Johnny, you tell Billy that you are sorry." And so they both begrudgingly say, "I'm sorry!" But are they sorry?

Husbands and wives sometimes will have a spat. What we mean by that is, they say some things, or they refuse to talk to one another. Someone is in the wrong, maybe both are in the wrong, but for sure someone has hurt the other person. Maybe it is something they said, or did, or didn't do. Tempers flare, feelings get hurt, and words are exchanged. And then it is so hard to make amends. Sometimes there is a curt, "Well I'm sorry!" But it doesn't feel like they are sorry. Why is it so hard? It is because repentance is something that calls for a change, not just in your thinking, your mind, or even in your actions. It is something that calls for a change way down in your heart and soul!

That's why John the Baptist, and Jesus and God Himself called on all men, everywhere to repent. Are they saying all men everywhere are the worst sinners in the world? No, that isn't what they are saying. You are not called to repentance simply because you have done wrong and you need to stop doing it, you are called on to repent because you've never admitted, you've never realized, or understood that it isn't just that you've done wrong, but down in your heart of hearts, you didn't even think of it as wrong. You never even saw how you were being so unlike the God in whose image you have been made.

Repentance doesn't just mean stopping the sin, or the wrong I'm guilty of. It isn't even, as we often say, "a change of mind that leads to a change of action." Yes, it does that, and if it doesn't do that, it isn't repentance. But Johnny can say I'm sorry, and Johnny can quit breaking his brother's toys, but that doesn't mean he has changed.

Don't you see that? God isn't just trying to change our minds. He isn't just trying to change what we do, but He's trying to change us so we are no longer like that. We are no longer the people we once were. We don't act the same way. We don't talk the same way. We don't have the same attitudes, or the same spirit.

We have become, as it were, a new creature, and that my friends, that is what God is trying to help us become.

And if that is what you would like to become, then let me tell you as Jesus told Nicodemus, "*You must be born again,*" and if you would be born again, the most important first step is the step called repentance.

If the Word of God has touched your heart today, and if you have a need to respond to God this morning, we would like to invite you to make that known by responding during the singing of the invitation song. Please come while we stand and sing.