

# The Sure Results of True Repentance

*Matthew 5-7*

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Good morning everyone. I'm delighted that you're here. I know you're here because you want to hear God's word and that's what we're going to do here today. We like to take the word of God seriously and it deals with the serious matters of life and the serious matters of eternity, the serious matters of sin, and the serious matters of redemption and salvation in Christ, and that's what we're going to focus on as a particular aspect of salvation. And I've titled this message "The Sure Results of True Repentance." The sure results of true repentance. 1 Samuel 16:7 says that God does not see as man does because man looks on the outer appearance, but God looks on the heart, and since God is a God that looks on the heart, we would expect his salvation to be something that deals with the human heart; that deals with the matter of our mind, our emotions, our motivations and our aspirations, and goes to the very point of our will and the things that we choose to do and the things that we choose to think and to the very person that we are. It goes to the very essence of who you are as a Christian and when you consider the doctrine of repentance and the work of God in repentance, you see that theme carried through, that God who looks on the heart does a work of salvation which transforms the heart and the outworking of that repentance goes on in a deep way in the heart in very significant and profound ways, that it's just endless. The more that I study the doctrine of repentance, the more that I teach on it, the more I see that it just goes everywhere. It's like unleashing a flood of water that just has no boundaries, it just goes absolutely everywhere, and I think that you're going to see that as we consider what we have for this morning.

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5. We're going to go back to this text that I've taught from a few times over the years and what I trust in whatever ministry the Lord gives me in the future, I'll be able to do again in the future. Matthew 5, 6 and 7, the Sermon on the Mount, probably more than any other text in the Scripture has personally transformed my life, transformed my thinking, and I never get tired of going to it.

Now Matthew 5. Last time we considered the nature of the call to repentance, what it is, the nature of the message that goes out, when we call sinners to repent, what is it that we are calling them to. And I'll just do a really quick review because I know many of you weren't able to be here last week, but we said there are three aspects to the call to repentance really, that first of all, repentance is a call to righteousness. It's a call to righteousness, a call to a righteous life. The call to repentance calls men out of sin, calls

them out of the present world into the kingdom of God, into a life of the pursuit of righteousness. It's a call to the dynamic character of a citizen of the kingdom of God that reflects the character of God himself. It's a call to righteousness. I'm not going to rehearse all of last week's message although it would be very fun to do that. I'm going to deny myself the pleasure for the sake of the pleasure that is actually in front of us here today.

Repentance is a call to righteousness, now secondly we said that repentance is a call to blessing. Repentance is a call to blessing and I said last week and I'll repeat it here today, that I think if anything is underemphasized in our Reformed circles about the doctrine of repentance, it's that we don't emphasize this enough. We tend to make repentance a matter of looking backwards and regretting the past and there is an aspect to that, we mourn over sin, we mourn over the fact that we have not lived righteously, we have specific conduct from which we want to turn, specific attitudes that we want to disavow, but it's not just a backward negative look. Repentance calls men to look forward to the blessing of God because the hand of God is a hand of blessing upon those who are truly repentant. We looked at that in depth. The call to repentance exposes your spiritual poverty and yet at the same time it beckons you, it promises you the blessings of God that are found at the Father's right hand. That really transforms the way that you look at repentance. It's not just a negative thing to make people feel guilty. We should feel guilty, I'm not denying that about our past lives, about our past rebellion to God, but it is a promise of future blessing that you turn from sin and judgment to the blessing and forgiveness of God and we need to help people understand that the God that we are calling them to repent to is a good God who intends to bless them if they will submit their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So it's a call to blessing, a call to righteousness, and finally last week we said that repentance is a call to allegiance. It's a call to allegiance to Christ. It's more than a confrontation about your past conduct. You could have a nagging mother-in-law, not that I do, let me hasten to say that. She'll be here in a couple of weeks. I love my mother-in-law. It's not about that at all. I just chose a nagging mother-in-law in general. You could have a nagging mother-in-law saying, "You shouldn't have done that. You shouldn't have done that," but the call to repentance is not nagging you about your past, it's calling you to allegiance to the person of Jesus Christ. It's calling you to recognize him as King and to give your personal loyalty to him. All of your unreserved affections and undiminished, unqualified submission and love to this one who offers his life to you, who died and rose again for the forgiveness of your sins to take away the penalty that your past conduct deserves, the call to repentance calls you to submit your life to him, to give your full and undivided allegiance to him as the surpassing love and priority of your life. So repentance calls you to gladly follow Christ without limitation, without condition to the cost that you would pay.

So that's the call that goes out. Now, when a person repents, what happens is that there is just a total spiritual revolution that takes place in their heart as a result of the work of God. Part of the life-imparting power of the Holy Spirit is that he gives the repentant person a new mind. He imparts the mind of Christ to them. He gives them a new heart. They are a new creation. That has a revolutionary internal impact on the repentant person.

He intellectually, emotionally and volitionally turns away from sin to the person of Christ. There is a total turning of the inner man. Lexically speaking, the word "repentance" means "a change of mind," and it's not a superficial change of an intellectual thought about Christ as some insufficient teachers would suggest, no, this is a total exchange of your inner man. It's a total change, a totally new mind, a totally new affection, a totally new will that is implanted within. There is this total revolution that takes place in a man when he has truly repented, and we'll talk about that hopefully at the end of the message today if I don't forget. I have it in my notes so I don't think I'll forget but if I do, you can ask me afterwards and I'll clarify what I didn't say.

But here's what I want for today, we've seen what the call is like, we've seen the nature of the response inside the man and now here's what we're doing today: what we want to do today is I want you to see from the Scriptures – get this – the sure results of true repentance. What is the internal fruit of true repentance. What starts to well up from inside a man. What starts to happen inside a woman that has truly repented. These things that we are going to look at, these five sure results of true repentance, are the things that you can look for in your own heart to see if you have truly repented or not and it gives you the goals and the aspirations of the Christian life. These things are the heart loves, the heart motivations, the heart affections of every true Christian. When we say that repentance calls you to allegiance to Christ, the question that we are asking now is what flows out of that allegiance to Christ? What is it that starts to flow out of that life?

And here's what I want you to see. I'll say this one more time: that repentance is more than, it's so much more than a backward look at your past failures. Repentance re-orientates you to look to the future with new affections, new desires and new aspirations, and when you work your way all the way through the biblical teaching on repentance, you'll see that there is an internal aspect to it, that there is a horizontal aspect to it in terms of your relationships with men and with the world, there is certainly a vertical aspect to it with your relationship with God, and there is also a forward dimension to it as you look forward into the future to what Christ is going to do at the end of the age. It's internal. These aren't the five points, I just want to kind of set the stage here. There are internal things that go on in your heart that have a horizontal impact with your relationships with the world. It totally reconstitutes your thinking and your orientation and your devotion to God, and it also changes the way that you look forward in the future. It goes everywhere. It's like blowing up a dam and just letting the water go everywhere. There is no aspect – get this – there is no aspect whatsoever of your internal or external life that is not affected by repentance. It is comprehensively pervasive.

So with that little bit of background and setting the stage there to kind of help you anticipate what we're going to talk about today, let me give you the five sure results of true repentance that you will find in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7. Matthew 5, 6 and 7, the sure results of true repentance. The fruit of repentance is what we are addressing here today and I'm very delighted that the Lord has given me the opportunity and the strength to share these things with you.

First of all, point 1: repentance changes your character. Repentance changes your character. It completely changes your inner man. What we are about to look at are the spiritual qualities that mark out the kind of person who has truly repented. Remember as we come to the Sermon on the Mount that in Matthew 4:17 Jesus had said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and as I explained last time, Matthew 5, 6 and 7 is his explanation, his exposition of what true repentance looks like. This follows right on the heels of Jesus' summary statement, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." You say, "What does repentance look like?" Here it is right in the Sermon on the Mount, right where you can read it with your own eyes, and these things, you need help to see these things but once they have been pointed out to you, you can go back and read them for yourself. I'm not going to tell you any secrets here. These are things that God has made plain and evident in his word and I love him for it.

First point: repentance changes your character. That is where Jesus starts in the Sermon on the Mount. Look at Matthew 5:3 with me and one of the things that I'm going to do, I'm going to read a lot of Scripture here and we're just going to look at the word of God and let it speak to us directly here this morning. Matthew 5, Jesus teaches on the way that repentance changes your character. He says, "Blessed." There is that word. The privileged recipient of divine favor. This is part of the blessing that is given in the call to repentance. It is a call to repentance that character is changed and you can see the promises that go with this change of character which are embedded in the blessing that God gives to those who repent. Matthew 5:3,

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Now I'm not going to exposit on all of those individual verses. We've done that in the past. You can get the series if you're interested in studying those verses in detail. What I want you to see is a little bit more of a big picture. I want to step back and use a wide angle lens to help you see what's really going on here, this big picture realization that repentance changes your internal character.

These Beatitudes that I read there are all statements about internal qualities: being poor in spirit, having a sense of spiritual bankruptcy, in other words; mourning over sin, verse 4; gentle, verse 5; hungering and thirsting for righteousness. The core of your desires, the deepest hungers, the deepest famished aspiration of your heart is that I would be righteous; is that I would manifest more of the righteous character of God in my life than what I do right now. You're driven. Just like you have physical hunger that urges you to eat, repentance gives you a spiritual hunger that urges you and causes you to pursue righteousness. When you're a Christian, you have an ongoing desire for the word of God that cannot be completely extinguished. When the flame seems to get low, something one

way or another, God brings it back and turns the lamp up and the fire engages again. If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know what that's like. Well, it's because God has worked into your heart a desire for righteousness, a change in your character, that's the point, that is oriented toward righteousness. That's what repentance does. Verse 7, mercy. Verse 8, purity in heart. Verse 9, peacemakers. Pervasive comprehensive change in character from the old man to this new man that is described here in Matthew 5.

Repentance changes your fundamental character. Let me show you this from a different perspective in Galatians 5 in a familiar text. So turn to Galatians 5 with me, if you will, Galatians 5:19 just to see the complete exchange of character that takes place when the Spirit of God moves into a repentant heart. Galatians 5:19 says, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." Those of you that came to Christ a little later in life can look at these three verses, Galatians 5:19-21, and see a little bit of autobiography there, can't you? You see a little biography in your life. Now that you've come to Christ, though, there has been a revolutionary change. Not perfection, change.

Verse 22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." Now look at verse 24, "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." The old man has died, a new man has come with new passions and new desires and that is a reflection of what I'm trying to say here that repentance changes your character. There is an interchange, an inner revolution that is permanent. It is not simply a matter of self-effort of saying, "I'm going to stop smoking," as if that is somehow repentance. What's so important about this is to expand your understanding, expand your view of repentance that it's so much more comprehensive than dealing with the one besetting sin that troubles you, the one besetting sin that seems to enslave you. Repentance is so much more than that, it's so much more than an external act that you habitually struggle with. It goes to your very character. These spiritual desires and commitments is what repentance changes.

So in light of those things, we should ask the question: how do you, how do I, how do we view ourselves in relationship to God? I mean, what are you really like inside? What are you really like inside? A humble heart before God and gentle before men, that is the spirit of true repentance. That is the character of true Christianity. That is one of the sure results of true repentance is that the character of the man is changed permanently toward godliness and righteousness. So when the call to repentance goes out, it forces us, it forces men to ask searching questions about the inner man. Beloved, is your heart moving in the direction of godliness? Is it moving in the direction of righteousness? Not perfection, we can't say that enough, direction. Where is the center of gravity of your heart, is it toward loving affections toward God and this kind of character? Because an

indifference to that is a sign of someone who has not been born again, someone who has never truly repented.

That's the first point, repentance changes your character. Now secondly and this is all just laid out in the Sermon on the Mount, secondly: repentance separates you from the world. Repentance separates you from the world. A Christian has a humble character that God blesses. That's what we just said. But on a horizontal level, this brings him into conflict with the world. The world does not honor him, instead the Christian often finds that insults and persecutions await him as a result of his new life in Christ.

Look at Matthew 5:11. Actually, let's start in verse 10. I don't want to neglect verse 10 just for the sake of time. We've got time for an extra verse in God's word, don't we? Matthew 5:10, notice the impact as we start to shift from this internal character to the horizontal interaction with the world.

10 Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

So there is more to say about this but we'll pause here for the moment, is to simply call out and to recognize that true repentance is going to set you at odds with the world because in your heart you have declared war against those fleshly worldly desires, because in your heart your character has been transformed, because in your character you have been called out of the world and into the kingdom of God. Now you have entered into a realm of conflict with the world that is inevitable because the world suppresses the knowledge of God, is hostile to him. It was hostile to Christ, it crucified Christ and therefore Jesus said, "If they persecuted me, they're going to persecute you."

So repentance has a pervasive comprehensive impact on the way that we interact with the world and many of you have seen that played out in the most intimate of family relationships. You know this by personal experience. Well, what I want you to see just by way of encouragement is that that is an expected part of true repentance. That is part of the price that you and I pay when we come to Christ is that it costs us at times human relationships that we would not choose to have interrupted on our own, but because the world is hostile to Christ, when we identify with him, it sets us at hostility with those who deny him, those who are opposed to him. So repentance separates you from the world. It's a natural, inevitable, logical consequence of true repentance.

Now, Jesus goes on. It's not just a purely negative aspect like that, the persecution to the extent you want to call that negative, but go on and continue to read what Jesus says. Let's look at verse 14. He says,

14 You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men [there is that horizontal aspect that I was describing to you] in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

So when you combine these passages together, Matthew 5:10-16, you see that on the one hand repentance sets you in opposition to the world and the men who love the world, the men who are opposed to Christ; there is an inevitable sphere of conflict that comes when you start living out true repentance in your life. But there is also a positive dimension in the way that it separates you from the world. It's in this in what Jesus said, that you and I live a life of consciously pursuing and being evidently aware of our responsibility to live a life of observable good works that would testify to your Father who is in heaven; that you and I would be men of character and men and women that manifest that character in a way that testifies to a hostile world, that testifies to the glory of God. So while we are separate from the world and that brings us conflict, there is a sense in which while we are separate from it, our lives are testifying into the world about the reality of Christ, about the reality of salvation, about the reality of sin and judgment. Our lives are an aroma of death to those who do not know Christ and so there is this horizontal testimony that emanates from our lives as Christians that goes into the world and has a testimony to them. We are separate from them in that sense but our lives are testifying into it.

This just occurred to me but in the same way that creation in Psalm 19, the heavens are declaring the glory of God and there is a testimony coming down from the skies that testify to the glory of God to unsaved men, in the same way on a horizontal level, Christians are testifying to the glory of God through their lives. There is absolutely no excuse for anyone to claim to be an atheist. There is absolutely no excuse that will survive final judgment to say, "Oh, I didn't know." They have testimony raining down on them from the sky. They have the testimony of the church around them and they have the testimony of conscience within them, their conscience bearing witness to the law of God even as they deny and try to suppress it. There is no excuse and your life, your simple, humble, quiet, Christian life is part of that testimony that goes out into the world.

So my co-laborer in Christ, my fellow witness to Christ, have you sensed the conflict that comes with unbelievers as a result of your faithful walk with Christ? Have you sensed that? Rejoice, this is why Jesus says rejoice. That conflict is a testimony to the reality of your repentance. That conflict is one testimony among many others that God has transferred you from the kingdom of darkness and Satan into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of Christ, and that you truly belong to him. The world doesn't persecute its own. The world doesn't hate its own, it hates those that are opposed to it and if you sense hostility coming from the world, there you go. That's why we rejoice. That's why we say, "Oh. Oh, this is good when I look at it from the right perspective. This is good. This testifies to me that I belong to Christ. This testifies to me that my hope of heaven is real. This testifies that I'm separate from this world that will one day bear the condemnation

and judgment of God and God has separated me out so that it won't fall on me. Praise be to his name!" Because repentance separates you from the world.

Now thirdly: repentance submits to God's law. Repentance submits to God's law. This is part of the vertical aspect of repentance that I was alluding to. You see this as Jesus continues on to teach. There is a very methodical approach that Jesus takes as he goes through the Sermon on the Mount that is just very, very evident. Repentance produces a heart that is inwardly submissive to the law of God that is found in the Bible. There is an inward submission that goes vertically toward God's law.

We should probably go to verse 17. I wasn't planning to do that but we should start there in verse 17. Jesus said in chapter 5, verse 17,

17 Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; [look at this] but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

This attitude and orientation toward the law of God that says, "I want to keep that law, I do keep that law directionally as the powerful motivation of my heart. I am oriented toward the law of God. I want to keep it. I know I fall short but I trust Christ in his righteousness to be my ultimate fulfillment of that before God the Father but I am not indifferent to the law. I am not hostile to the law. I keep it as the treasurer of my heart and when I have opportunity, I'll teach others to do the same." There is a submission to the law of God that is embedded in true repentance and Jesus says the one like that shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. It's not greatness in terms of your public visibility, the number of people that know you, it's a matter of this internal, as Jesus is speaking here, this internal desire to honor God's law and to honor the God who gave it. Jesus says the one who keeps and teaches like that, he is one who will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. And I don't know about you, but I'd rather be called great in the kingdom of heaven than great on the kingdom of earth, wouldn't you? Repentance orients your heart towards God's law. It brings you to submission to the law of God found in the Scriptures.

What I want you to see as we go through here more quickly now, is that we're talking about an internal submission. Jesus goes beyond the external conduct that the law calls us to to realize that the law touches on your heart as well. Look at verse 21. This is familiar territory so we don't need to spend much time here. Verse 21,

21 You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court;



And on he goes. Verse 27,

27 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; 28 but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

There is this heart attitude that it's not just murder, it's anger. It's not just physical adultery, it's lust. And there is that repentance brings you to the recognition that the law of God impacts your heart as well as your external conduct.

Look at verse 43,

43 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

A whole reorientation of submission to God's law that affects you internally.

So the truly repentant person increasingly comes to realize that the law does not only prohibit certain sinful conduct, it prohibits sinful desires. The law not only prohibits conduct, wrong conduct, it positively requires righteous desires and conduct. It's not just avoiding sinful things, it's positively pursuing the righteous things and the repentant heart realizes, understands that orientation of God's law, embraces it, loves it, is happy to pursue that because his heart has been changed from hostility to God's law to conformity to it. That's where his deepest desires lie. A repentant heart understands and realizes that it falls short of God's law even as a believer but the key for what we're saying right now is that that repentant heart doesn't spurn the law, isn't hostile toward the law, but it embraces the law as holy and good and just. The repentant heart recognizes, "I fall short of that law but if I could keep it perfectly, I would, because that law of God expresses what the desires of my heart are. I don't buck against it, I could only pray for a greater manifestation that the precepts of the law would emanate from my very character."

So as you consider what the doctrine, the biblical view of repentance says, you see that it brings you to the most deep and profound questions, that there is this revealed law external to you that has claim over your life and the question is how do you view that law? How do you respond to it? The repentant heart says, "Of course, I embrace that with all of my heart, with all of my loves." Repentance brings you into submission to that law and to a loving heart embrace of God's word. It does not leave you neutral or hostile to it. One of the surest marks of true salvation without which no one has a right to think that they are a Christian, every true Christian is going to have a heart desire and a heart love for God's word and a desire to obey it. Someone who is cold and indifferent to Scripture, who can leave it on the shelf week after week, month after month without any pang of conscience is someone who does not have a regenerate mind. They are still in their sins. They are not Christians. They are not saved. The word of God is an acid test of the reality and knowing how much so many of you, knowing you personally, knowing how much

you love the word of God, how you hunger after it, those of you that have some inkling of that and even knowing the sense of imperfection with which you live out that desire, realize that that love for God that is in your heart is a clear and sound testimony to the reality of your conversion. Look at that desire in your heart and rejoice in the God who put it there, right?

Point 4, still looking at this vertical dimension now. Point 4: repentance – I like this one – repentance seeks God the Father. Repentance seeks God the Father. What I mean by that is this, precious principle, life liberating principle, life shaping principle: the truly repentant person, the true Christian, seeks the approval of God over the approval of men. It is better to have one day in the courts of God than a thousand outside. It's better to have the smile of my Father upon my life than the approval of men around me. That is the attitude of every true Christian.

Look at Matthew 6, beginning in verse 1. Jesus states these principles both as warnings and as promises. He states the negative and the positive. Those of you that are in seminary, you could learn a whole lot about teaching methodology simply by studying the Sermon on the Mount and seeing how Jesus taught. Matthew 6:1, repentance seeks God the Father. Now watch this. We're going to read a few verses here. Chapter 6, verse 1,

1 Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

"I don't want to be noticed by men so how do I live that out, Jesus? Give me some examples that would help me understand." Our blessed Lord answers that desire of our heart, verse 2, so here's an example,

2 So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that [here you go, we're getting to it now. Repentance seeks God the Father, look at verse 4 and you see what Jesus means by that] your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

"Content for men to not notice, for men to be unaware of my effort to live out righteous giving, righteous living. Content and knowing that my Father sees what's done in secret and he'll reward you, he'll reward me and that's what I'm happy to seek. I don't have to call attention to my righteousness because it's not about you seeing it and you commending me for it and vice versa. Your righteousness isn't about me seeing it." Ultimately, what ultimately motivates us is that we seek the approval and favor of God and we seek his approval whether men understand or not.

Verse 5 of Matthew 6,

5 When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Verse 8,

8 So do not be like them [don't be like the Gentiles in verse 7]; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

So the repentant heart and I realize this is convicting. It convicts me just as it convicts you. The repentant heart realizes and embraces the principle that we are really indifferent to whether men notice our righteousness or not but what we really want, what our truest desire is that we would be found by God to be pleasing to him and that's what we seek as the ultimate priority in our life.

Look at Matthew 6:33 where Jesus says,

33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

The true Christian, the repentant heart knows that the Father, God the Father sees these things in secret and he trusts the Father to reward him in the Father's good time. One of the things that true repentance does is that it makes you patient. Because you trust God and trust God the Father, you trust the heart of the one who sent his Son to be the Savior of the world and that he included you in that saving purpose, you are patient to let him work out his blessing in your life even when there seem to be contrary circumstances at the time. Even when life seems to fall apart, you're not ultimately shaken from your foundational trust in the Father because you are seeking him as the first priority of your life and if he's done the greater thing in sending Christ, then you can have confidence and patience that ultimately he is going to bless you in the end despite the interruptions and the problems that come in between now and then. And the true Christian is content to say, "I may wait until I get to heaven. I don't have to have an answer today. I don't have to have an answer in this life to the things that trouble my heart because ultimately my heart is finding its rest in God the Father, in his goodness and assured blessing in my life, and so I am content with weaknesses and insults and distresses for Christ's sake for when I am weak, then I am strong," 2 Corinthians 12.

In seeking God the Father, the Christian comes to the place, let's turn over there, 2 Corinthians 12:9, talking about how repentance causes us to seek God the Father, this is one of the ways that that works out. It makes you patient in affliction. You can be patient in affliction. Beloved, you can be content in your affliction when you understand these things, when you embrace them as the desires of your repentant heart. 2 Corinthians 12:9,

"He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." The repentant heart rests in the promise that the Father will reward you regardless of whether you gain the praise of men. Repentance rests in the assurance that the Father's grace is sufficient for every need. Repentance rests because the Father is the priority, not earthly circumstances.

So beloved, as a means of pastoral encouragement to you to the extent that you came in here distressed and overwhelmed by your circumstances, understand that the key to diffusing some of that stress that you feel is coming back to the reality of repentance. Come back to the reality of your spiritual repentance that is ultimately the guiding force in your heart and realize that part of that, an aspect of that repentance is trusting the Father's blessing, seeking him and seeking his approval more than the praise of men, more than ease and content in this life, because if you can have that sense of the Father's direction, you can rest in the promise of God the Father's goodness in your life, then those earthly stresses on your heart diminish in importance because you are brought back by reviewing the nature of your repentance. You are brought back to what really matters in the depths of your heart to begin with and that promise of God the Father cannot be broken, that promise of God the Father cannot fail. He will bless his children. He will reward them in the end and that is where your strength, that is where your comfort lies. Be content to not know the answers. Be content with unsolved problems. Accept them as a means that drives you to seek greater deeper grace, a greater experiential understanding of the sufficiency of the grace of God. That's what repentance will teach you to do because it has reoriented your heart in this vertical manner that causes you to seek God the Father.

Well finally in our final few minutes here, point 5: repentance sobers you about final judgment. Repentance sobers you about final judgment. The Bible states and Jesus taught here in the Sermon on the Mount that God will one day judge men and that one day each of us will stand before Christ to receive our reward for our service to him in this life.

Now, in chapter 7, verse 1, I want you to see this, Matthew 7. Go back there if I didn't already call you back. Matthew 7, we're almost done here. I just want you to see that in this sermon that explains repentance, Jesus points us to consider final judgment. Matthew 7:1,

1 Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged

You're going to be judged by the way in part by your attitudes toward other people.

2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

Verse 13 of Matthew 7,

13 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. 14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Then of course in Matthew 7:21-27, Jesus also points us to judgment. We won't take the time to look at that. Here's what I want you to see, Jesus says, "Don't judge because you're going to be judged in the way that you judge others. You will be judged." He says, "Enter through the narrow gate, not through the broad gate." And in other places there in Matthew 7, he is emphasizing, he is causing you to look forward, he is calling you to look to the future, to calculate the future eschatological things that are going to happen and to bring those into and factor those into the way that you live life now. Anyone who understands future judgment is going to live differently today as a result of it. It sobers your approach to life. It reorients you. You and I should be living with an eye, a constant eye, one eye on the time in the future where we will stand before a holy God and give an account. Repentance, brothers and sisters in Christ, true repentance causes you to pursue holiness because you are conscious of the fact that you will one day give an account to him. You can't live indifferently. You can't live in disregard to sin because you put the individual sins, you put the temptations and the attractions that might cause you to sin, you see them in the context that, "No, I'm going to stand before Christ one day. I'm going to give an account. I want that to go well."

So repentance impacts your character, it separates you from the world, it orients you toward God's law, it causes you to seek the Father, and it sobers you about final judgment. It's internal. It's horizontal. It's vertical. It's future. The impacts, the sure results of true repentance and we've only touched on these things but it helps to see it in a broad perspective. What I want you to see, beloved, is that it's important to realize that repentance is not confined to that initial moment of salvation where you first put your faith in Christ. Repentance does not make you perfect but it reorients your heart for life. It changes your whole orientation toward everything inside, outside, up and future. So each day we should have a heartfelt repentance for our sins and continually be drawn back to these attitudes that we've seen today.

Now question: think back to your life before Christ and how dead in sin you were, hostile to the Gospel, even as a young person, just being a lying disobedient person toward your parents. I mean, sin manifests at the youngest earliest parts of life, doesn't it? And your heart was hard and cold and indifferent. How is it that repentance could change us so dramatically? How is it that it could reorient a total mindset about life? When you understand what repentance produces, it brings you back to the reality that God must produce that change. Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven. You need new life from above." It would be an utter impossibility, it would be a total impossibility for an unsaved man to just start out on his efforts and just try to collect in his mind, "Okay, these aspects of my character will change and my view toward God's law will change and my view toward the world will change." You could

never do that on your own. No man has the capacity to think that way, let alone the power to actually turn and change. The reason that there can be such a comprehensive unified change in a man is because he is born from above because God produces that kind of repentance in the heart of the man and it takes the power of God to change a character, to change a horizontal emphasis to look to the future. You don't do that on your own power. If you see the signs of repentance in your life, you have direct evidence that God has caused you to be born again. When you understand the fruit of true repentance, you see why the new birth is necessary. Only God, only God could so change a human heart and orient it in that direction.

Rightfully so, I have spoken to you this morning as sharing in the things of Christ but I'm mindful that there has got to be some of you who have come to realize under the sound of God's word that you do not truly know the fruit of this kind of repentance. Your approach to Christianity has been superficial and weak and stammering and you say, "This has never been true of me. It has never been true of me and it's not true of me now. What about for me?" Well, if you're convicted of sin and you realize how you fall short as a result of these things from Matthew 5, 6 and 7, don't run away. Don't flee from these kinds of truths, from this kind of conviction. Let that conviction open your eyes to your need for Christ. I stand here today as an ambassador of a great and merciful Savior, a great and merciful Savior whose sole purpose for coming into the world was to save sinners. Christ came to call sinners to repentance. He came in the world to save sinners and if you're here today apart from him, convicted by the things that we have said this morning, come to Christ. He calls you. He brought you here this morning to hear this word to see your need exposed so that you would come fleeing to him for forgiveness and for eternal life. Ask him for the gift of eternal life. He will be faithful to give it to you. Turn from your sin. Put your faith in Christ. I beg you, I plead with you to come to Christ in true repentance because I know just as he did for me, he will give you the life that enters into the kingdom of God.

Let's pray.

*Our Father, we pray that you would work out these things in each of our hearts according to your will. Give us grace that we might honor you. Thank you for the gift of repentance which could only come from you. And now, Father, having planted in repentant hearts in our lives, Father, bring forth the fruit from that which you yourself desires. As we go forward this day and as we go forward in life, O God, we pray for your guidance, your wisdom, and your help to become exactly what you created us to be, exactly what you ordained our salvation to accomplish in this life right now. You didn't save us 50 years ago, you didn't save us in another time and age, you saved us for this very time right now in the context that you have placed us in. So Father, we pray, we invite you, we ask you, it's our deepest heart desire that having done that work in our lives as we look to the future and the rest of the life that you give us, that you would work it out according to your will and help us to be willing participants and joyful witnesses to the work of your Spirit in what lies ahead. We commit all of these things to you with the deepest gratitude we can offer you. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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