

The Lord's Command to Repent

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When we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, there is a specific content that we are preaching. We are speaking about historical realities that are good news. The gospel is not related to you changing your moral behavior in order to be reconciled to God, the gospel is a declaration that God has done something on his own initiative to reconcile you to him. The gospel is good news about what God has done and what has God done and what is it that we declare in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Well, in brief summary, we are saying that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, and that he left his glory in heaven to come into the world in order to live a perfect life on behalf of his people, and he gave that perfect life, he offered himself up, he offered his life blood on the cruel cross of Calvary for guilty sinners like you and me in order to satisfy and fulfill God's wrath against them, to satisfy the justice of God which each one of us had violated through our breaking of his law. And as we said during our Scripture reading earlier, we declare in the gospel that Christ is risen from the dead and that resurrection shows that he is Lord over all, and that he has accomplished salvation for sinners, and that Christ having completed his work of redemption, ascended into heaven where he intercedes for his saints, where he reigns in glory, and that one day he will return to earth for his own and to judge this guilty world. That's the gospel. It's about Christ and what he has done. It is a declaration of the good news that God has had mercy on sinners in the Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from human effort, apart from human initiative, apart from human deserving, for sure, God has done something for sinners and we declare that and offer it freely to everyone who would hear and to everyone who would believe.

So we offer eternal life to sinners just like you, that you can come to Christ and find salvation and forgiveness of your sins freely from the hands of a gracious God in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we declare, and today we ask this question in light of those wonderful truths. We ask this question: how is it that you are to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ? What is the response that God calls for from you in order that that redemption that has been accomplished would be applied to your own soul? Could there be any more important question in the universe? Could there be any more important question in your life than to know if you have been reconciled to God in the proclamation of this glorious gospel? Because the Bible makes it clear that not everyone will be saved. Jesus, in fact, said that the path is narrow that leads to life and there are few who find it. When the cataclysmic judge of the flood came, only eight people were saved in it, and so it is important for us not to take salvation for granted, it is important for you not to just

assume that you are a Christian because you were born into a Christian family, it's important for you not to assume that you are a Christian just because you have gone through certain religious rituals, it is important, so very important for you to understand that you are not a Christian simply because you have avoided some of the grosser sins that mark our decadent world all around us. None of that has anything to do with entering into the kingdom of God.

How are you to respond to the gospel? Well, Scripture makes it clear, our Lord Jesus made it clear about what you are to do in response to that proclamation, and if you would turn to the gospel of Matthew 4, we will see what it is that Jesus said he calls sinners to do in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is a message that is not popular, it never has been, it never will be. That's okay. It doesn't matter if it's popular outside the walls, the only thing that matters is whether this is a message that you, yourself, have responded to. Nothing else matters today. And Jesus, it is said, in Matthew 4:17 after he had endured the temptations of the devil and after John the Baptist had identified him as the Messiah who was to come, Scripture says,

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The gospel is responded to with repentance. You respond to the Lord by repenting of your sin and, that is, this verse gives kind of an opening summary of what the message of Christ was. Jesus Christ is the King of heaven, and so when he was on earth, the kingdom of heaven was right at hand because the King was right there. And now, beloved, through what God has appointed is through the preaching of his word, the kingdom of heaven comes near to you today in the proclamation of the gospel, and the call is that you would repent. And so the title for our message today is "The Lord's Command to Repent," and for the next couple of weeks, today and next week at least, we're going to consider again this theme of repentance.

I never get tired of preaching on this theme, this theme was as some people know, this theme was at the very very fountain source of Truth Community Church going back nearly 10 years ago. I preached on repentance often but, honestly as I sit in my study and as I was considering it, as I said, you know, during our time away, I feel like I haven't preached on it enough. I'm concerned about the spiritual state of some of you, and I'm mindful that as young people were born into families and are starting to grow up into the church and growing up into their own lives that, you know, these are things that you need to hear afresh with a mature mind, a developing adult mind, you need to hear this. Even if you have spurned it and rejected it in your heart and spurned it from your parents, you need to hear this from God's word and realize that Christ is bypassing everything about your past and everything about your family, and speaking directly to your heart through his word today and calling you to repent. I'm delighted by the growth of our church. I'm delighted by all of the new people that have come and I don't get tired of telling you how much our arms are open and how much we embrace having you here, but as new people come, some, you know, perhaps coming into a church for the first time, some coming from other churches, and I can't take for granted what you've heard about the gospel in

other places, I need to preach these things again in light of the changes in our congregation. And so here we are with this theme of repentance that the Lord has for us this morning.

What is repentance? That's the question. And what does it look like? How could you know if you have repented or not so that we can look and see if the elements of repentance are present in our own lives or not? Because it's common, what I mean by common is that these themes and these aspects of repentance that we're going to consider are the common lot of everyone that the Lord draws into his kingdom. He draws people to himself and he grants them this gift of repentance and it is the same, it is in quality the same kind of gift to each one who believes.

Well, what is repentance? One of my favorite lexicons defines it in this way, and the Greek term in Matthew 4:17 is from the verb, the Greek verb "metanoeo." And you say, "Well, why are you telling me that?" Well, I'm telling you that because I like the way that verb sounds. Metanoeo. Metanoeo. I think that's just a cool word and I like saying it, and so metanoeo. What does it mean is the more important question and it's defined this way in one of the lexicons. It says repentance, metanoeo, is to have a serious change of mind and heart about a previous point of view or course of behavior. What I want to emphasize on that is this, beloved, it is a serious change of heart. It is a profound redirection of mind. This is not like changing your opinion about which newspaper is your favorite or which website you like and, "Oh, I like this one better than that one." Or you know, which chat app you prefer to use. Such superficialities and changing of mind is not what repentance is about at all, and so we set the stage for our consideration of repentance here this morning by understanding that it is serious. It comes from the depth of the human heart and produces a profound change that we're going to explain as we go along.

J. C. Ryle, the great Bible commentator from a hundred years ago or more, said this, and you know, there's a lot to be said for reading the older guys, the dead guys, and put away the fluff that you find on Amazon and go and read serious writers like J. C. Ryle and others like him. J. C. Ryle said this and I beg you to listen to me all day today and especially in this definition. He said this, "True repentance is no light matter. It is a thorough change of heart about sin, a change showing itself in godly sorrow for sin in a heartfelt confession of sin, in a complete breaking off from sinful habits, and an abiding hatred of all sin. Such repentance is the inseparable companion of saving faith in Christ."

You see, the change of mind, the serious reorientation of heart that is taking place in true repentance is a change of orientation toward the sin that previously dominated you, the sin that you previously loved. You come to see that sin brings judgment and that sin is contrary to the righteousness of God that is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you have this recognition that there is this foul, black thing inside you that loves what God hates, you recognize that you have rejected Christ and spurned him and, at best, neglected his word if not outright despising it, and this great God of mercy and grace, you have spurned him, broken his law and in the whole time you've been utterly dead and indifferent to it or openly hostile to him in the process, and you come to see that that is a black, foul cancer on your soul that must be excised, that you want to be free from and to

be delivered from, and that this is not simply about one or two bad things that you have done but it is about a total orientation of life that has been opposed to God and neglected God and his holy, wonderful, majestic word.

So it's serious. It's serious about the change that it produces inside your heart, and it's also serious about its consequences. The Bible says that people without repentance will not go to heaven. You can talk about Jesus all you want, you can profess to be a Christian all you want, but if this vital element of repentance is absent from your heart, you are still dead in sin and separated from God and in danger of eternal judgment. Now I ask you, I know these are weighty issues but the Bible's a weighty book, and I ask you, what kind of pastor would I be if I didn't press this upon your conscience for you to know and to understand? Am I to be regarded as an enemy because I tell you the truth? Am I somehow hostile to the interest of your soul because I tell you that things may not be right between you and God if this repentance is absent from your inner man? What kind of fool would reject the treatment of a doctor who is able to make him well simply because he doesn't want the diagnosis that he is sick?

Well, let's consider this. What we want to do this morning and to rehearse also next week, is we're going to consider four aspects of what repentance is and what it looks like and what's involved in this multifaceted diamond of the gift that God grants to those that he saves. What is it that repentance looks like and what does it do inside you. Well, first of all, the first aspect where repentance begins, it begins with a knowledge of your sin. A knowledge of your sin, and what we mean by that is this, is that repentance begins with an intellectual or, you could say, mental understanding that you are a sinner with personal guilt before God. You are a sinner with personal guilt before God.

Look at Matthew 5:3. Matthew 5:3 says this, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now I want you to notice something really vital right at the start here. In Matthew 4:17, the verse we looked at a few moments ago, Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," right? Now in Matthew 5:3, he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." That phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," links these two verbal thoughts, links these themes together so that when we see Jesus say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," we notice that there is no context in verse 17 that explains what it means to repent, and if this repentance is necessary to enter into the kingdom, that would seem to be a major omission to me unless there was something that came behind it to give us an understanding of what repentance meant. Obviously, Jesus was going to explain what it meant, and so we know by the verbal link in Matthew 5:3 when he's talking about the kingdom of heaven, that he is embarking on an explanation of what repentance is, and the entire Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' exposition on the doctrine of repentance. We won't go into all of that, as tempting as that might be to do again. For now, I simply point out that Jesus opens his Sermon on the Mount saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

So this first aspect of repentance that leads into the kingdom of heaven is this idea of being poor in spirit, and as we've said often and we'll say many many more times if the Lord gives me breath and gives me years in ministry, I am never going to stop saying these things, Jesus uses this word "poor" to express spiritual poverty. He is not talking about material poverty. There is no intrinsic virtue in being poor. There are poor people who are desperate sinners. There are rich people who are wonderful Christians. It is not about material wealth at all that he is addressing here, he is addressing the human heart that is in need of repentance. And so this knowledge of your sin, it starts with an understanding that I am a spiritually bankrupt sinner before a holy God.

Why would you say that? You know, I mean, look, it just occurs to me as I'm standing here, not that I haven't thought of it before, but there is, you know, we have been conditioned for decades in our society to love ourselves, you know, and to take pride in yourself and homosexual pride, and everything's about pride, about how good you are, and you know, and we're not supposed to say anything bad about anybody and certainly not about ourselves because that will lead to a poor self-image and then who knows what happens if you think poorly of yourself. Well, beloved, we've got to, we have got to, and you individually, you have got to understand that the Bible sets a collision course against that worldly thinking. Jesus says it is good, it is a mark of divine favor for someone to regard himself as being poor in spirit. The word "blessed" means that you are a privileged recipient of divine favor.

And what is this spiritual poverty, what is this knowledge of sin of which he speaks? Well, and this is fundamental, this is at the very foundation of what it means to be a Christian. And for some of you, maybe, being here and having come out of other spiritual backgrounds, this is a wonderful opportunity for God to open your eyes and your mind, and I pray that he would do so, perhaps hearing some of these things for the very first time, to be poor in spirit means this, it means and just using it in, not trying to define it in a technical way, you recognize that God is holy and that his law is good, and when you see yourself in light of the holiness of God, when you see yourself in light of the perfection of his law, you understand this about yourself, you understand this about yourself: you know that your works and your religion and your rituals have left you bankrupt before him because there is nothing good about you that commends you to God in a way that would force him to receive you into his kingdom. You've broken his law. You are not holy like God is. You are not divine. And so you fall short of who God is and what God requires, and you start with that understanding that that is what is true about you no matter what others have told you in the past, and how you have built yourself up on self-help books and things like that that have told you how great you are. It's not true, for we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Romans 3 says.

Repentance excludes any sense of spiritual pride in your heart. It excludes any sense of personal merit or boasting before God. It excludes any possibility of someone saying that, "I'm going to go to heaven because I've lived a pretty good life. The good outweighs the bad. I'm not as bad as other people. I've avoided certain sins or I've done certain things." The repentant person does not speak in that language. In repentance, that kind of spiritual

pride is like a completely foreign language that cannot come off of the tongue. That's what repentance starts with, it starts with this knowledge of sin.

So I ask you this question, beloved: have you turned to Christ like that? In your confession of Christ, have you come to see yourself as an utterly unworthy sinner who is in absolute dependent need of the mercy of God because you have nothing good to commend yourself to him? Do you know that you are a sinner? Do you understand that? Do you embrace that? Do you openly confess that before men? We're not saying and it's not this, it is not what I'm about to describe. Repentance is not this mealy-mouth statement that says, "Well, you know, of course, I'm not perfect." Well, we knew that. The question is do you confess that you are a guilty sinner before God who has no claim on him?

Let's approach it from another angle. I want to get this right. It's more than saying, "I don't deserve to go to heaven." That's a good step in the right direction because none of us do deserve to go to God's holy home and the place of his resplendent glory. None of us deserve that. Repentance goes further and says, "Not only do I not deserve heaven, do you know what I do deserve? I deserve to be sent to hell for my sin. I know my sin, I know it violates God's holiness, I know I've broken his law, I know there are consequences to that, and I own it." That kind of repentance, friends, is a subset of the broader evangelical church.

So we ask whether you know and understand that you are a sinner and in your coming to Christ, do you come to him not as someone who needs his earthly help, do you come to him as the one and only one who can save you from sin because you know that you are a sinner? Have you come to Christ like that, I ask you? I ask you. Now secondly, there's this knowledge of sin, secondly, there is this sorrow over your sin. There is this sorrow over your sin. It's one thing to know and to confess it, but true repentance goes further into your heart.

I remember the day, the blessed day of my conversion many years ago when the Spirit of God opened my eyes after a night of partying with a friend. I remember the change that took place as I looked in the bathroom mirror, and for a moment, I looked... Oh, the mental image is still there. I wish I could break the mirror and not have to see that pathetic countenance again. But I remember looking into the mirror, recalling the night of partying that had just transpired, and I smiled at myself and said, "You really did good last night." And in the next instant, my heart was broken. That was the moment that the Spirit of God opened my eyes, and looking at my face in the mirror as the Lord was working, looking back on it, the Lord was working repentance in my heart, there was this shocking resounding thought in my mind, I won't call it a voice because you'll misunderstand that, there was just the thought came to me and said, "You call yourself a Christian?" Because I did. I would tell people I was a Christian but I was not repentant at all. Said, "You call yourself a Christian? How could you do what you did last night if you know Christ?" And all of a sudden my entire world and my entire view of myself was utterly deconstructed. It utterly collapsed as I looked into that mirror, and I knew I was not a Christian, and I knew that just based on the prior night that I deserved eternal

judgment from God. It was a frightening moment in my life. The fear of God finally came upon my heart and I knew that if I died in that moment, I was going straight to hell and it would be a just judgment when I did.

So I fled into my bedroom and I lived alone, I knelt down beside my bed and said, "Lord, I've thought all of this time that I was a Christian but now, I don't know." And in so many words, I said, "Lord, I'm turning to You and I'm asking You to save me because I am a guilty sinner and I deserve eternal judgment. Save me. Come into my life. Save me. No restraints. No conditions." I speak this morning of things that I know by experience as well as from God's word.

So there's this sorrow over your sin emotionally. There is an emotional aspect to repentance that includes a fear of God and a sorrow, a grief over your sin. Look at Matthew 5:4. It's all right here in the text. It's all right here in the text. What kind of man would I be if I didn't say these things to you? What kind of pastor doesn't say these things to his people, I ask you? Verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." The mourning, this word "mourning" describes an inner agony, a grief, and I want you to understand that Jesus is talking about spiritual mourning here, not earthly sorrow. He is not talking about those who mourn over the loss of a loved one. That's not what he's talking about. This is spiritual mourning. Verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." You see, he's talking about things of the heart, things of the spirit, things that are oriented vertically toward God and what God requires here, and you see that as you read the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.

So he's talking about a poverty of spirit, the inner man. He's talking about hungering and thirsting for righteousness, the inner man. He's not promising comfort to everyone who loses a loved one. All kinds of people go through life, sadly, bury loved ones and they sorrow over it, but that doesn't make them a Christian, that doesn't make them repentant. And so we see that he has to be talking about something else here, and the idea is this, is that this knowledge of sin, this recognition of your guilt before God brings grief and sorrow to you, and that becomes one of the distinguishing marks of true repentance, sin brings agony to the heart of a repentant man.

Let me invite you to turn over to the gospel of Luke. I was just going to read this verse but I think it would be good for you to see it and turn to it in your own Bible. Luke 18:13. Jesus is drawing a contrast between a self-righteous Pharisee and a repentant tax collector, and I won't read the whole context, I'll simply point out the sorrow over sin that the tax collector demonstrated in this parable that Jesus taught to show the difference between true and false repentance. In verse 13, he says, "the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'" His grief was so great that he had to release it physically. Oh, the inner pain and he beat his chest to get it out. And he says, "I'm the sinner." You know, it's a personal confession. "Lord, I'm the sinner, not anyone else."

So let me flesh this out for you just a bit here and in a predominantly conservative congregation in many ways and also politically, it's very important for me to say this. When we talk about repentance and whether you hate sin, grieve over sin, beloved, understand this, we are not asking and the Bible is not asking you whether you oppose the predominant sins of society like abortion or homosexuality, if you're opposed to those things that you, yourself, have not done. A hundred years ago, it was the temperance movement in opposition to alcohol that became the great mark of things. And this is a common problem that the church falls into again and again, defining righteousness by the absence of society's sins of which we have not been guilty of ourselves. Some of you have had abortions, some of you have been in homosexuality but that doesn't diminish my main point here. The question is not whether you are opposed and offended by the sins that other people commit. That has nothing to do with whether you are repentant or not. The question is whether you are repentant over your sins, whether you are the sinner in your own eyes. We're asking if you grieve over your sin, do you grieve over your anger, your lust? Do you grieve over your unforgiving spirit, your gossip? Do you grieve over that? That's the question in true repentance. Forget about what the world does, what about you? What's your attitude toward your sin? Because we've established that you know that you're a sinner, the question is what's your response to that? Some people know they're sinners and they love their sin and they don't want to get rid of it and so it doesn't matter that they know about it, they still love it and continue in it and reject all pleas to repentance to the contrary. Simply knowing about your sin doesn't make you repentant, it's part of it but it's not all of it. We're asking whether you grieve over your sin, beloved, and so I ask you if you've turned to Christ like that? Have you turned to Christ knowing that you're a sinner and grieving over it? That's the question.

There's a third aspect to repentance that I want to call to your attention today and it's this, it's turning from your sin. It's turning from your sin and this is a matter of the human will, the human volition. In your heart volitionally, you turn from sin in order to serve Christ. Go back to Matthew now, Matthew 5:5 and 6. Matthew 5:5 and 6. Jesus says this... By the way, I should point out one thing to you. I've taught this enough that I assume things that I haven't made plain today. This section of Scripture known as the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the...", Beatitudes referring to that "Blessed" formula, notice in chapter 5, verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." In verse 10 it says, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It's a device that brings them all together. It's bookends. You start with the bookend in verse 3, the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven, verse 10, persecuted, theirs is the kingdom of heaven, talking about an exclusivity, theirs and theirs alone. But the idea is it gathers it all up into a single unit. These descriptions of the different aspects, the different blessings that Jesus describes, are like the different colors of a rainbow. You look at a rainbow and you see distinct different colors but it's all one rainbow that is there, it's all making up different aspects of the same one rainbow. Well, in a similar way, Jesus is describing different aspects of the same theme of repentance here as shown by the literary device of including both at the beginning and the end the concept of the kingdom of heaven.

Why is that important? I'll tell you why, that is important because you are not to view these things in isolation. You're to view them together. True repentance manifests like a rainbow manifests the different colors. True repentance manifests all of these different actions, different attitudes, not simply one of them. So blessed are the poor in spirit, you know your sin. Verse 4, blessed are those who mourn, you grieve over your sin. Now verses 5 and 6, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Hungering and thirsting. Jesus uses an analogy of the physical desires to describe the spiritual desires of the soul. Whereas before the unrepentant person had no desires for true righteousness, loved his sin as I did, and was indifferent to the things of God, well, in repentance there is a complete reorientation of what you desire in your heart, and the repentant person is one who hungers for righteousness like a hungry man desires a sandwich. He thirst for the holiness of God in a way that the desert traveler thirsts for water. He has these spiritual desires for righteousness indicating that something is changed in his heart, there has been a reorientation of what he wants in life.

So repentance, we see in these two verses, does this, it produces a humble meekness in your heart and a desire for holiness. Jesus called the rich young ruler to that kind of change in Luke 18:22. He said, "One thing that you still lack," he had come and said, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus said, "Keep the commandments." He says, "Ah, I've done that." Didn't know about his sin, wasn't grieving over sin for sure. So Jesus challenges him at the level of his volition and says, "You," it's singular, this is not what he says to everyone, it is what he was saying to this man in this context. He says, "Here's what I want you to do." He exercises his Lordship over the man's soul and he says, "Here's what you lack, you sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven, and come, follow Me." You know what the rich man did, he said, "I'm out of here. Not me." He went away grieved because he was one who had many possessions and he didn't want to give them up. Jesus called that man to abandon his earthly priorities and to follow him, and in the same exact way to each one of us, he calls you to abandon your earthly loves, your earthly priorities and to follow him instead as the supreme object of your affections.

You see, repentance affects the whole inner man. You turn from sin to live for God according to his word, you turn from your unrighteousness with a desire for new things, the righteousness of God becomes your desire. Look at Matthew 6:33. Jesus says, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness," seek it first, first, as the matter of the highest priority of your heart, seek his righteousness first. Volitionally, in your will, you have oriented your mind and your heart toward the things of God.

So beloved, we could say this to express it another way. If you refuse your will to Christ in obedience to him, you are not a Christian because you are not repentant. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they and they alone shall be satisfied." Everybody else is outside. Everybody else is excluded from the kingdom. It starts to get kind of personal, doesn't it? Do you see why at the start of the message we said that this is a serious change of mind, a serious change of heart?

In repentance, the sinner consciously turns away from his sin in order to give his life to Christ and to live in accordance with his word. Let me say this to you, add another dimension to this, and I can't tell you how sweet and precious it is to be able to say these things to people whose faces manifest the fact that they want to hear it. It gives me hope that the Spirit of God's at work here as we look at his word today together. Let's look at it a different way. In repentance, you want something specific, in repentance, you want more than deliverance from hell. True repentance wants Christ and his righteousness. It's not simply, "Lord, save me from the consequence of my sin," repentance says, "Lord, save me from sin itself, save me from my miserable attachment to darkness, and disobedience. Save me from all of it so that I might be delivered unto righteousness for thy name's sake." Repentance wants more than just to not go to hell.

Look, my friends, anyone with any sense doesn't need to be instructed not to want to go to hell, that's not a good destination, but it doesn't make you a Christian to simply want to not go to hell. Repentance looks beyond hell. You think about hell, it's really the consequence of sin, what repentance says is, "I want to be delivered from the cause of hell. I want to be delivered from the cause which is sin. I want to be delivered from the wickedness within me. God, be merciful to me the sinner."

Let's take a little break. Now someone might object to this and one of the objections that is raised against the biblical teaching of repentance is that people misinterpret it or misunderstand it as being a suggestion of salvation by works. "You know, you're saying that we have to be saved by what we do." Now look, that is not good thinking. Everything that we've said up here presupposes your sin and your total inability to do anything to please God, right? And we've said it's the knowledge of sin, sorrow over sin, turning from sin. The whole presupposition of repentance is that you cannot save yourself by your works, we're talking about an inner response to the gospel of Jesus Christ, not to something that you do that credits merit to your account. Repentance does not earn you any merit before God, indeed, Scripture says that this kind of repentance is a gift from God. 2 Timothy 2:25, "perhaps God will grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." Acts 11:18, "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life." If it's a gift from God, beloved, stay with me here. I stamp my foot in emphasis here, not because I'm throwing a tantrum. If it's a gift from God, it is not possibly a work in which man can boast, is it? So we're not talking about that and, you see, I think that one of the things that the devil does in order to distort repentance is he confuses people on that point and say, oh, this is talking about salvation by works, in order to evade the call to repentance altogether by applying a false theological label to it. Don't go there. If nothing else today, ask the Spirit of God to deliver you from that kind of false thinking.

So in repentance, we understand and freely acknowledge that we're sinners, we grieve over the fact that we've sinned against God to the point that the understanding drives our emotion and the emotion drives our will, that's the biblical pattern, and in our grief over sin, we turn from it because we hate it and want to be delivered from it. That's what repentance looks like and so I ask you this question: have you turned to Christ like that? Have you turned to Christ like that, knowing you're a sinner, grieving over your sin, and abandoning it for the sake of Christ? Have you turned to Christ like that, I ask you? I ask

you with the gentlest spirit that I know how to muster from my own carnal heart. I ask you in the gentlest spirit of a pastor that cares for your eternal well-being. I plead with you not to turn away these things from God's word. Have you turned to Christ like that, my friend?

The fourth aspect. We could say this, that in repentance you change your commitment to Christ. You change your commitment to Christ. You transfer your highest affection to the Lord Jesus Christ, is what you do in repentance. Now let's stop here for just a moment and recognize something really important about what we just said. Repentance is not simply the negative of turning away from sin, in true repentance you are turning to someone new, you are turning to something, not merely away from something, and that object of your turning is to turn to Christ so that Christ becomes your Lord, your Master, your sovereign King over you and your heart.

Look at Matthew 10. We looked at this just very recently on February 14 in my message "When Love Hurts." We'll look at it from a different perspective here today. Jesus said in verse 37, "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." You see, Christ not only calls you out of sin, he calls you to himself and he calls you on terms of unconditional surrender, of a transfer of allegiance. What he has said here in this passage in Matthew 10 is this, he says, "Follow Me or you will die in your sins." You see, repentance that goes all of the way, the repentance that is a gift from God goes beyond a turning from sin into a submission to Christ, to the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember this one who has come to us in the gospel, the one who left heaven, came to earth, lived a perfect life, died on the cross for sinners like you, rose from the dead and ascended back into heaven. That Jesus says, "Follow Me." And one of the marks of his supremacy is the fact that we love Christ more than our nearest and best, more than father, more than mother, more than son, more than daughter. Listen, the attitude of true repentance is this, "I'm going after Christ. I will follow Christ whether anyone comes with me or not. Whether my family comes with me or not, I'm going to follow Christ. Whether I'm persecuted or not, I will follow Christ." There is this unreserved love, devotion and submission to him that makes him the highest affection in your heart.

Look over at the gospel of Luke 13. I want to show you a couple of passages here. Luke 13:3, Jesus said, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." He repeats it again in verse 5, "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Look over at chapter 14 of Luke, verse 26. Jesus...there is no substitute for reading the Bible for yourself and not simply taking someone else's word for it about what it means or what the gospel is or what it means to be a Christian. Luke 14:26 and 27, "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. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

Now look, Jesus was not offsetting the fifth commandment which says honor your father and mother with what he said here, what he's saying is this, is that "by comparison to your love for Me, everything else is so secondary that it's like hatred because there is such a greater devotion and love to Me instead." Jesus requires us, if we would be his, if we would go to heaven, to give our entire heart allegiance to him exclusively and supremely, and if you withhold that, you cannot be his disciple. You're still in your sins, you're still going to hell no matter how much religion you've professed. It's serious. It deserves to be handled in a sober manner. Jesus calls for an unconditional transfer of your deepest heart commitment to him and him alone. My friends, I ask you: have you turned to Christ like that?

Now let me just say a couple of things here. This is a lofty standard, isn't it? This is very searching. And I should say this, none of us repents perfectly, none of this knowledge or sorrow or turning and heart commitment, none of it is perfect in this life and I say this by way of helping you to encourage you and to protect you from false, you know, from a false threat to your assurance. Listen to me carefully: your repentance does not need to be perfect in order to be genuine. It does not need to be perfect in order to be sincere. But no one is repentant who refuses his heart to Christ. No one is repentant who gives his will over to sin. No one is repentant who doesn't have some kind of hatred and repulsive response to his own disobedience to God. No one is repentant who doesn't understand that he's a sinner in the first place. It doesn't have to be perfect but the elements are all there at least in some kind of seed form. Not using myself as an example but just going back to what I said earlier, when my heart was struck by fear as I looked into that mirror at 1214 North Dunn Street, Apt. 7, Bloomington, IN so many years ago, I knew I was a sinner. It grieved me. I wanted to turn from it and I cried out to Christ. All of that present in a moment of change wrought by the Spirit of God in my heart. It was not perfect, it's still not perfect. I had no rudimentary understanding of what was happening in my heart at that time. In the subsequent nearly 40 years, I've been learning about it ever since and I'm still learning about it. My point for you today is, are the elements of it there somewhere in your heart, "I'm a sinner. I don't know how bad but I know I'm a sinner. It grieves me. Even though I still struggle and sometimes I want to do what I know I shouldn't do, but it grieves me that there's still that remnant of sin in me. It's not perfect but it's real. I turn from it. I freely confess my sin and I have to confess a lot," you say to yourself, "and, oh, I love Christ and I want Him more than anything. Oh, for grace to love Him more. If only I loved Him more, my prayers would be answered." You see, it's not a perfect repentance that God requires, but a genuine one, a sincere one.

Now one last question for this morning to answer a potential concern or objection. Someone might say, "Aren't we saved by grace through faith? Why all of this talk about repentance? Doesn't Acts 16:31 say, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved'?" Of course, it does but we don't define our entire soteriology by one single verse. The whole Bible speaks to this. We have to look at what all of Scripture says and not simply because we went to AWANA when we were a kid, focus on one verse as if that is a comprehensive statement of everything that God has revealed about the nature of a saving response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Good grief, I wish some people would grow up and not speak such childish foolish things in order to evade the doctrine of

repentance. I'm not speaking about any of you in here, just that whole mindset. Grow up. I want to look at these people and with R. C. Sproul say, "What is wrong with you people?" How many times does Jesus have to emphasize repentance before someone takes it seriously and doesn't just try to evade it by pitting his own word against itself? This is not a righteous handling of the word of God at all, and it is trifling with the eternal souls of people who hear. You see, the way that you understand this is that saving faith is repentant faith. Saving faith is not simply a mere mental adjustment. True faith that is granted by God as a gift, God gives the whole package that includes this dynamic of repentance, and the Bible promises no salvation to people who are unrepentant.

So repentance turns from sin. Faith simultaneously receives Christ and all of his saving work and rests upon Christ alone for salvation. You see, repentance in one hand, faith in the other hand, they are interdependent, they are locked together. You don't find one truly without the other also simultaneously being present. Saving faith is repentant faith. Repentance is a faithful looking to Christ. And so you turn from sin and by faith, my friends, you ask God for mercy based on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There's another way that you can see the importance of this to Christ. Matthew 4:17, he opened his ministry, summary statement, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Look at the end of the gospel of Luke 24 after his resurrection. After his resurrection so the work was done at this point. In Matthew 4:17, he's embarking on his public ministry as Matthew records it for us. He starts talking about repentance. In Luke 24, it's done, he is about to go to the Father in the ascension and what does he say in verse 47? Actually, let's go back just a step here. Verse 45, "He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,'" there's the gospel, that's what we started with. Verse 47, "and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." And so bookends. At the start of his ministry, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When his earthly work was completed, he says, "repent for the forgiveness of sins." And he had finished the catalog, it was the encyclopedia from A to Z of his earthly work. It was done and he commands to his disciples, "Carry this message out to all the nations, to everyone who will hear, repentance for the forgiveness of sins," and in between he explained what that repentance was and that's what we've considered here today.

So my friends, young people, old people, male and female, married and unmarried, friend and foe, I ask you: have you turned to Christ like this? If you see these dynamics working in your heart, rejoice because you have been the recipient of divine favor for God to work a work like that in your heart, and he who started the work in you will finish it until the day of Christ Jesus. If I've been speaking a foreign language to you that is foreign to your experience, my friend, I invite you to Christ. I call you in his name to repent and to believe in him for your eternal salvation. Will you do that today? Will you walk out of this room with Christ or without him? If you walk out without him, understand that it's by your own choice, not because he has withheld anything that is necessary for the salvation of your soul. What a great and merciful Savior. He calls you to repent and to receive him.

Let's pray together.

Dear Lord, the external call has been made. Grant by Your grace the internal call, that effective internal call to the hearts of those who need Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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