

The Call to Repentance

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I'd invite you to turn to Matthew 5. We're going to go back to the Sermon on the Mount today and next week. As I mentioned at the first part of our time together, a few months ago I preached a message on repentance at the Truth Matters Conference and in that message I emphasized the internal response of repentance. The internal response of repentance, that what true repentance looks like from the inside of the sinner who is responding to Christ, and by extension you could also say what repentance looks like in the heart of a Christian who is repenting of his own sin as a believer in Christ. There is an intellectual recognition of sin, there is an emotional reaction against sin, there is a grief of a repulsion that you feel of sin in your life, there is a volitional turning away from sin and a surrender of allegiance to Christ that marks true repentance; all of those factors and you can listen to that message and hear those things expounded in greater detail. That is the proper response to Christ who was crucified and resurrected for our sins. You can't continue on in sin. You can't claim Christ without turning from sin. That would be irrational and, of course, the whole segment of so-called evangelicalism that says you can come to Christ without turning from sin, we condemn that; we reject that as being totally unworthy of what Scripture says and a total perversion of the true Gospel of Christ. We call men to repent and part of the reason that we call men to repent is that that is exactly what Jesus Christ told his disciples to do before he ascended into heaven. In Luke 24:47 Jesus said that his disciples were to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins and so we have considered that internal response of repentance that contemplates a saving response to Christ.

Now, the accent of this particular message today is just a little bit different. The theme is still repentance but I want us to consider it from a different angle and to consider what is the content of the external call to repentance. What is it that we are calling sinners to? What is the emphasis of what we say? What is the emphasis of thinking that goes into the call to repentance? What does Scripture say to those who are in sin? That's the idea. That's what I want to consider today. What we're about to see is the content of the message that provokes that internal response in the life and heart of the sinner. I want to address that from the Sermon on the Mount.

I think I told you Matthew 5, if you'll forgive me, go to Matthew 4. I don't think that will challenge you too greatly to go back one chapter. Matthew 4:17. We're going to cover some things that I've said years ago in the past with some additions based on things that

have come to my understanding since then. In Matthew 4:17, it's a pivotal point in the Gospel of Matthew; it's a pivotal point in the life of Christ and in the ministry of Christ. He had just been baptized in Matthew 3. The voice of the Father had come down and said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," and so he had been recognized and affirmed publicly by a voice from heaven, the voice of the Father saying, "This is My beloved Son," in essence, "listen to Him." And then as Jesus enters into his public ministry, Matthew gives a summary statement of what Jesus' preaching was, the content of Jesus' preaching in Matthew 4:17. He said, "From that time on Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" That's a summary statement of the intent and the meaning of Jesus' preaching.

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And the reason that he could say that the kingdom of heaven is at hand is because Christ himself is the King. He is the personal embodiment of the kingdom. So when Christ comes and when Christ was physically present, the kingdom was at hand because the King was right there with them. You can't get any closer to the kingdom than to have Christ right there in front of you. And the point of his message when he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," the point is that there needs to be a spiritual transformation before a man or a woman is set and prepared to enter into the kingdom. Unsaved, unregenerate men are not fit for the kingdom. They cannot enter into the kingdom. That is why we must preach repentance to them. That is why Jesus said, "Repent." The current state of affairs in the life of a sinner is unacceptable for entrance and admittance into the kingdom. You have to repent.

So Jesus is preaching repentance. This is the summary statement. It's an overview there in Matthew 4:17. You notice in that verse and in the verses that immediately follow, there is no explanation of what it means to repent. There is no expansion of what that says. There is no interpretation. If all you had was Matthew 4:17, you would not know exactly what repentance means. If that was the only verse that we had, you would have the command to repent but you would not know exactly what that meant.

Well, notice this. I've pointed this out multiple times over the course of my ministry and I'll tell you this right now: if the Lord gives me another 30 years of preaching, I'm going to point it out multiple times in the future as well because I think it's so important. Notice this: in Matthew 4:17, put your eyes on that verse, Jesus says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He's calling people to repentance so that they might enter into the kingdom. Now, slide your eyes over to the next column in your Bible, Matthew 5:3. Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount and says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the," what? "Kingdom of heaven." What I want you to see, what I want you to understand and I think it's important, that's why I say it and have repeated it so many times, is to realize that the opening verse of the Sermon on the Mount links by that phrase "the kingdom of heaven," it links back to chapter 4, verse 17. Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," and then he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What that is telling us, what that is showing us, is that we are to understand the details of the Sermon on the Mount in view of that summary overview statement of, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The Sermon on the Mount, here's the point: in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus Christ is interpreting what repentance means. He is explaining to us what repentance means. It is a full lengthy exposition on the doctrine of repentance, on the call to repentance, and everything about it underscores and undergirds and explains what he meant when he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." So as you are reading the Sermon on the Mount, you are reading what Jesus meant when he said, "Repent." And so it's important to see that big picture theme. So let's step back and just think about Scripture for a moment. At the very opening of his ministry, Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Just before his ascension in Luke 24, he said, "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins shall be preached to all the nations." So the doctrine of repentance, the call to repentance, functions as bookends to Jesus' public ministry and everything in between is designed to undergird and provide the theological foundation for repentance to be proclaimed. It was at the beginning of his ministry, it was at the end of his ministry. We cannot miss that and be faithful students of the Gospel.

Now, that's what we want to talk about. That's what we want to see. What does the Sermon on the Mount, what are its big themes as we look at it? What are the big themes of repentance, is another way to ask the same question. Well, listen, the call to repentance, I'm going to give you a definition here: the call to repentance tells men to turn from sin toward biblical righteousness. The call to repentance tells men to turn from sin toward biblical righteousness in order to give irrevocable allegiance to Jesus Christ and to receive divine blessing. That last part is what I'm really going to camp on in this particular message but we're going to talk about all three aspects of it. The call to repentance tells men to turn from sin toward biblical righteousness. There is an inward turning away from sin. Repentance is so much more than a reformation in conduct. It is so much more than sitting down and grieving over your prior sins. That is an element of it but there is a forward looking dimension to repentance that isn't emphasized often enough.

So we say again: the call to repentance tells men to turn from sin toward biblical righteousness in order to give irrevocable allegiance to Jesus Christ and to receive divine blessing. When Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," he was telling people to turn from sin toward righteousness and he was calling them to himself because he is the King of the kingdom. "Come to me," he says, "and receive divine blessing as you turn away from sin unto righteousness."

Now, the call to repentance calls the lost to salvation. People who do not know Christ when they hear the call to repentance, are being called to come to true spiritual salvation but what I want you to see and recognize so that you don't just think about it in that particular context, that the call to repentance speaks to you and me today as well. Without doubt was you understand the call to repentance because the call to repentance as Jesus expresses it in the Sermon on the Mount calls you and calls me out of our existing spiritual mediocrity, our spiritual indifference, our accumulated sins that we haven't really repented of, it calls us out of all of that to a renewed pursuit of Christ in our pursuit of sanctification. Same themes, different application. The themes that we call sinners outside of Christ to, are the same themes that you and I need to hear daily in our own

spiritual lives: to pursue righteousness, to be loyal to Christ, to be conscious and trust in divine blessing. It's all there. It's the same message, it's just applied differently by the Spirit of God depending on whether you're in Christ or not. There is something for everyone here today and so it applies to your own personal life and it also – get this – it also shapes the way that you explain the Gospel to people as well.

Some of you are so very faithful to reach out in the name of Christ and to share the Gospel in your circumstances that the Lord has placed you in. I respect you and appreciate you. I wish I was a better evangelist than I am but what I want you to see is that as we are sharing the Gospel, these three themes that we are going to see today are the themes that we want to emphasize as we talk to people who do not know Christ, and it's also the themes that we want to preach to our own hearts. It's the themes that should motivate us in our own spiritual lives. They are big overarching themes. It's not about a particular individual sin or a particular individual action that we are concerned about, we are concerned about a whole mindset, a whole disposition of life. That's what we're talking about.

So the first theme in the call to repentance is this, point 1 if you want to take notes, and it's going to be point 1 even if you don't want to take notes, okay? Point 1: repentance is a call to righteousness. Repentance is a call to righteousness. It is a call to recognize the supreme value and purity of the character of God, the character of Christ, the enormous goodness of his law, and to embrace that as the right standard of life, character and conduct. Repentance is a call to righteousness.

Now, let me say this at the start of this particular point. When we talk about repentance, when the Bible calls people to repentance, when a preacher calls people to repentance in a biblical fashion, he is doing more than imparting information. We are doing more than imparting information about theological themes to people when we call them to repentance because repentance confronts the entire man. It addresses his mind, his heart, his soul, his strength. It addresses the entirety of the inner man. It doesn't simply address and ask him to simply think differently, it asks him to recognize sin in his life as something to grieve over and to volitionally turn from. We're not trying simply to win an intellectual argument when we preach repentance, we are calling for an entire life change.

Look at Matthew 5:3 through 6 here and I'm just going to touch on these verses because they were really the substance of that message from Truth Matters that I mentioned earlier, but we need to start here. Jesus says,

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 [or the meek], for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

That's a description of the inner response of repentance. What I want you to see here it's referring to a guy who recognizes, it's referring to a man who understands that he is a broken spiritual beggar before God who has no spiritual resources of his own to

commend himself to God. He is a spirit in poverty, no merit to offer to his own so we has to look outside himself if he's going to have any opportunity to have the righteousness that is required to enter into the kingdom of heaven. You start there recognizing you don't have it. "Blessed are those who mourn," it grieves the truly repentant man that he is sinful. It's not a matter of indifference to him. It's not a casual, "Oh, I wish I hadn't done that. Ah, I wish I was different." No, this is grief at the core of the inner man that mourns in agony saying, "Oh, I am so sinful! I can't stand what I am like! I need to be delivered because the way that I am and the man that I am now is unacceptable and it grieves me!" That's the mark of someone truly mourning over sin. You are broken over sin.

"Blessed are the gentle," verse 6, again looking at this inward dynamic of it in verse 6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." There is an inner desire for righteousness that goes beyond just conforming external conduct. There is a desire for true purity, for true righteousness to be manifested, and that's what the inner response of repentance looks like.

Now in the call to repentance, remember repentance is a call to righteousness, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is calling us to righteousness. He's calling us to – here's a definition of righteousness – he's calling us to the dynamic character of a citizen of the kingdom that reflects the character of God himself. The character of God himself. The call to righteousness is a call to reflect the character of God in your life, the character of a thrice holy God, the character of a good and great and holy God.

Look at Matthew 5:20. Again, I want you to see the sweep of the themes here. Repentance is a call to righteousness. Matthew 5:20, Jesus said,

20 For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

There is a call to a surpassing righteousness that goes beyond the external hypocrisy of the religious leaders of that day.

Look at Matthew 5:48, Jesus said,

48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

The standard of God the Father being the mark that is required of righteousness in the kingdom of heaven and Jesus says, "That's the call on your life as well." Perfect righteousness, that is the standard. God doesn't lower the standard simply because you and I don't meet it.

Look at Matthew 6:33, the call to righteousness. Jesus said,

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

It's the command of repentance to seek righteousness first. Seek his kingdom and his righteousness first as the surpassing priority of your life. And the call to repentance emphasizes to each one of us that earthly convenience is not a matter that transcends the importance of righteousness. Sometimes righteousness is very inconvenient but you seek that righteousness first despite the earthly convenience that might surround it because that is the call of repentance and the one who is truly repentant embraces that and says, "Yes, that is what I want. I want God's righteousness displayed in my life. I want to manifest the inward character of a righteous God to the fullest extent possible." That is the call of repentance. It is an inward desire, an inward turning away from sin that embraces the standard of righteousness, biblical righteousness, as the rule of life for the one who is repentant.

This is all about your desires. It is all about the inner man. It is about the deepest vibrations of your heart that says, "Sin is my sworn enemy." And I hope you understand, I trust you understand that what we're talking about here are inward matters. I'm not talking about the particular external sins that you struggle with right now. That's affected as a consequence of it but what we're talking about is what is the orientation of your heart. What is the orientation of your inner man. What is the orientation of your affections, what you love the most. And as you read through the Sermon on the Mount, you realize that repentance is a call to come out of the world, to come out of the world environment in your affections; to come away from the sinful lusts and desires that you have pursued and treasured in the past; to come out of sinful relationships; to come out and separate yourself from that because the call to righteousness has come to your heart with such great power that you can do nothing else.

So as you read the Sermon on the Mount, you realize that Jesus is calling men out of a world of murder and anger and adultery and lust and divorce, calling us out of that to realize that the ugly sinfulness of that, the ugly sinfulness of anger and manifestations of anger, violent outbursts against others, repentance calls you out of that as being a gross violation of the righteousness of God. Repentance calls us out of a world of lawsuits and lies and hypocrisy and false religion, out of a world that treasures vengeance, that cherishes and nurtures anxiety, out of a world that tolerates false teachers and false prophets. You can see those themes throughout Matthew 5, 6 and 7. I'm just giving them to you in an overview fashion to realize that repentance calls us out of a world of murder and anger, adultery and lust, vengeance, false religion, false prophets, lies, hypocrisy.

What you should see when you hear that is you should recognize, "Yes, that's the world environment in which we live. This is what the world is like and it's getting worse." You recognize that environment. The one who is truly repentant, beloved, if you are truly repentant you should realize and understand, go through your mind, "Oh, do you know what? I am part of the problem. I too have been the hypocrite. I too have been the angry one. I too have been the lustful one. For some of you, I too have been the adulterous one." And you realize you are not focusing your hatred of sin against the world out there, you realize that it's your personal sin that you want to repent of. True repentance is not about the sin that's out there that others are committing and saying, "Yes, I hate their sin." That's not repentance at all, really. True repentance is when you come around and say, "I

hate my sin. I'm part of the problem here in this world environment and I repent of that. I'm not turning my heart against the sins of other people. They can deal with that on their own. My repentance is over my sin. I grieve over my sin, over my spiritual mediocrity, over my indifference to Christ, over my awful treatment of others in relationships. That's what I'm repenting of."

You see, that's true repentance. You don't shuffle off the blame to someone else and say, "Yeah, he needs to repent." No, no, no. Let's not even go there. When we're talking about repentance here today this morning in Grace Life, you and I are the ones that need to repent and unless that's your mindset, if that's not your mindset let me promise you you're not taking repentance seriously at all. If you have a sense of weight that says, "Yes, it's not my spouse but it's me that needs repentance," the call to repentance is starting to come home with power to your life. You see, repentance calls you personally out of your sin to serve Christ in newness of life. You consciously engage your own will and say, "This is the sin in my life. I turn from that. I reject that. I turn my back on that so that I can pursue righteousness instead." I've quoted Spurgeon in the past, he says, "A Christian need never stop repenting, for I fear that he never stops sinning completely." So even when the power of sin is broken in our lives by Gospel salvation, there are still those remnants of sin that carry on and flare up in our lives and we repent of those.

One of the benefits of being a pastor in the same place for a long period of time is that you realize you know people and you realize that these things are true, so you don't hesitate to say these things to people that you love and that you care about because you know as a pastor that they need to hear them. You need to hear this. Christ is calling you to greater righteousness than what you manifested this past week. If it makes you feel any better, he's calling me to the same thing. We're all in this together but it is a profound deep call to repentance.

Now, with all of that in mind, look at Matthew 7:21. Jesus in his call to repentance is teaching for keeps. He is serious about what he says and the implications of this message of repentance that is found in the Scriptures is enormous. It's incomprehensibly big because the call to righteousness that is embedded in the call to repentance leaves you with no alternative but to respond or to walk away but you cannot leave unchanged. Matthew 7:21, Jesus said,

21 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will [there's that phrase again] enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

Verse 24,

24 Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.

You see, you just can't walk away from Jesus' call to repentance without realizing that the consequences are incalculably great. How a man or woman or child responds to the call

to repentance is determinative of their eternal destiny. Now, we'll define the nature of this righteousness and how it actually works out in our heart and life attitudes, we'll define that righteousness more next week. For now, I simply want you to see that repentance is an inward turning away from sin toward righteousness that results in outward change.

It starts with the inward change. If you have been cultivating sin in your life, if you've been indifferent to righteousness and all of that, you can't fix that by simply saying, "Okay, now I'm going to have my quiet time," if your quiet time is not a result of saying, "I'm going to turn inwardly from that and I'm going to pursue the Scriptures to help me in that." Don't insult God with a quiet time if you don't intend to actually turn from the sin in your life. Just save yourself the trouble because repentance is an inner matter. It's an inner turning away from sin and you can't cover it up with a quiet time. You can't cover it up by coming to church. Jesus says there must be an inner change. That's the repentance that matters. That is what he calls us to. Quiet times are good, being at church is good, I'm glad you're here this morning, just don't confuse what it does. It's not a substitute for real repentance, that's the point. When we talk about repentance, we are not talking about behavioral reform but a total turning of the inner man from sin toward the righteousness that is revealed in Jesus Christ and in the Scriptures. Total turning of the inner man. That's the call to righteousness that repentance makes.

Now, secondly, and I love this next point and I'm just going to trust the Lord for the time to get through it in the way that I want to. Point 2: repentance is a call to blessing. Repentance is a call to blessing. I'll bet 95 percent of you weren't expecting that when I said that. Repentance is a call to blessing. The call to repentance and the call to righteousness that is embedded in repentance convicts us over our sin and it leads us to spiritual mourning. Most of us feel a measure of conviction over what we just saw in the Scriptures in the prior 15 minutes but when you truly examine the doctrine of repentance in the Scriptures, when you see how Jesus treats this theme in the Sermon on the Mount, you realize that the call to repentance doesn't leave you there in that realm of conviction. It convicts you in order to change you. It convicts you in order to bring you to divine blessing. No question about it. Embedded in the call to repent is the promise of forgiveness and blessing.

I want to say something here. This aspect of the call to repentance, the call to blessing that is an intrinsic part of the true call to repentance, is less emphasized in Reformed circles than the call to righteousness and I want to do my part in this little corner of the world to correct that imbalance or at least point it out and do what I can to point it out. There is a call to blessing that is inherent in the call of the Gospel to repentance and we shouldn't be shy about proclaiming it. We shouldn't hide it as though it's something that you find out about later because when the biblical writers talk about repentance, they are repeatedly holding forth promises of blessing when they call men to repent. We don't call men to repent from a position of spiritual superiority so that we can put our boot on their neck and they have to submit to what we say. We call them to repent with a promise that God will bless them if they do. "Come and be a fellow heir of the blessing that God has given to me because it's available to all who will repent and believe." The Sermon on the Mount is filled with promises of blessing to those who repent.

Look at Matthew 5, we're going to spend a lot of time here. I hope I get through it otherwise you're all going to be late for second service. Matthew 5:3-11. I'm going to bounce on the top of this. I just want you to see this word that as he's calling men to repentance, Jesus says, verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the gentle. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who have been persecuted. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you." Blessing after blessing after blessing after blessing. The word "blessing" here refers to someone who is the privileged recipient of divine favor. The person who is repentant is a person who is now the object of divine favor and we don't hide that. When we call people to repent, we should tell them that there is blessing inherent in it and not simply give them a cold call of conviction that doesn't point them in the direction of God's love and mercy and blessing.

Look at Matthew 6. I'm not even going to address all that I could say about this just from the Sermon on the Mount just for the sake of time, but as Jesus is working out the doctrine of repentance, showing how it applies in the matters of prayer and giving and fasting, look at Matthew 6:4. He says, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Verse 6, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Verse 18, "your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." Verse 8, "your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." Reward and blessing and intimate knowledge, these are marks of divine blessing. These are tokens of the goodness of God. When we call people to repent, we are doing more than calling them out of sin, out of their sin and out of a sinful world environment – get this – we are calling them into the sphere of divine blessing. Leave that realm of judgment and sin and unrighteousness and come into the realm of righteousness and blessing. Oh, dear sinner, I plead with you in the presence of Christ to come out of that so that you could know the favor of God on your eternal soul.

That's the call to repentance and when you realize and understand and reflect on the miserably lost estate of sinners, you realize the bondage of sin that they are under, that they are dominated by the devil and they are doomed to suffer the wrath of God, when you have opportunity to share Christ with them, how could you ever be cold and indifferent in that? When you understand this call to divine blessing, it gives an accent of urgency to the message. "Oh, I feel compassion on you! You are lost! Come out of that into the blessing of God! He promises blessing to you if you will only repent."

Look at Matthew 6:33 again. Look at these promises, look at these future indicatives, these statements of fact guaranteed by the promise and character and faithfulness of God. Matthew 6:33,

33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,

Stop seeking your old way of life. Stop following and pursuing sin. Repent and seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and I'll promise you this, when you do,

all these things will be added to you.

Divine promise. Divine promise of blessing, provision and protection, all guaranteed to the one who will seek first the kingdom and the righteousness.

Look at Matthew 7:7,

7 Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

This isn't talking about praying for whatever earthly thing you want, it's talking about the pursuit of righteousness, the pursuit of true repentance, and you're saying, "God, help me in this pursuit of righteousness. Help me bring forth the fruit of repentance. That's what I want. That's why I ask again and again and again because I'm not satisfied with the level of manifestation of that righteousness that I find in my life." And the Scriptures say, Jesus Christ himself says that when you pray and seek righteousness in that manner you will find it. God will bless you with the reward, the attainment of that spiritual goal for which you seek. Ask and it will be given to you. Seek it repeatedly and you'll find. Knock and keep on knocking because God will open the door to you.

Verse 8,

8 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

It's a divine promise. If you find yourself saying, "I want that but I don't find it in my life. I'm discouraged." Well, it's not a reflection that God's promise has failed, it just means that you need to ask some more because when your inner man is so in tune with this call to righteousness, you want it so much that you're not going to stop seeking it and stop asking for God's provision and spiritual help to you simply because the reception of the promise has been delayed. You say, "I don't care how long it takes, God, I'm not going anywhere until you bless me. I'm going to grab hold of you like Jacob did and I will not let go, I will not stop asking until you bless me with greater spiritual growth, a greater manifestation of righteousness, a greater love for Christ in my heart. God, I'm not going anywhere so you might as well give it to me because I'm just going to keep bugging you until you do."

You see, the call to repentance promises God's favor. It beckons us to ask. It beckons us to hope. It beckons us to expect that. To say, "Of course he's going to bless me with his favor. He has promised." Of course, and all of a sudden spiritual life and the pursuit of repentance and the pursuit of righteousness is not an overwhelming thing because we see how far short we fall. How far short we fall starts to fade in significance as the moon fades when the sun rises and you say, "Oh, I see the promise of God's favor and it's starting to drive away the darkness of doubt, the darkness of discouragement. The promise of God's favor is shining brightly on my life as one who has repented and now I

have hope and motivation to persevere." And if you're here today without Christ and the call of repentance is falling on you as a call to surrender your life in an initial decisive way to Christ, understand that that call to repentance and to turn from your sin comes with the promise that God will bless you if you do. There is no one who has truly come to Christ that God has not super-abundantly blessed in life. I'm not talking about material blessing, I'm talking about the blessings of a clear conscience, a sense of forgiven sin and the sense of hope and peace and eternal life, that sense of divine favor.

And you can see this repeatedly in other scriptures and I want you to see this. Isaiah 55. We are going to quickly turn through a few different scriptures here. I want you to see these verses, jot them in your notes, put a checkmark in the margin of your Bible because I want you to see that I'm not making this up. I want you to see how often the themes of calling people to righteousness along with the promise of divine favor are interwoven together. Isaiah 55:7, "Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD," there is repentance, and what is the promise that goes with that? Still in verse 7, it's the same verse, "And He will have compassion on him, Let him return to our God, For He will abundantly pardon." Come to Christ and receive abundant pardon. Come to Christ and God will have compassion on you. That's the message of Scripture.

Turn over to the book of Hosea, just past the book of Daniel. You go to Ezekiel, then Daniel, then you find the book of Hosea. Beautiful promises in the call to repentance to the nation of Israel. It's a shame they haven't heeded it yet. Chapter 6, Hosea 6. I'll give you just a second because I really want you to see this with your own eyes in your own Bible. Hosea 6:1, "Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, That we may live before Him. So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; And He will come to us like the rain, Like the spring rain watering the earth." God's favor will be like rain that refreshes the barren ground and brings forth fruit.

Look at Hosea 14. The call to return. The call to repent. Hosea 14:1, "Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, For you have stumbled because of your iniquity." Do you see what he's doing? He's just calling them out of sin. He's calling them to righteousness. He's calling them to come to God. Verse 2, "Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity And receive us graciously, That we may present the fruit of our lips.'" At the end of verse 3, he says, "in You the orphan finds mercy." Verse 4, God responds to their repentance and says, "I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; He will blossom like the lily, And he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon. His shoots will sprout, And his beauty will be like the olive tree And his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon." And on and on it goes. Oh, beloved, do you see the inherent call to blessing that is in these calls to repentance? They are magnificent. These are magnificent.

Turn back to the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew 11. We need to hurry so turn quickly, okay? Matthew 11 in verse 28 Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-

laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy and My burden is light." He's promising blessing to those who come to him.

Now just keep your finger there and I'm just going to read you one other verse in the book of Acts 2:38 at the end of his sermon, "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,'" listen to the end of this, "and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise," the promise, not the threat, the promise, "the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." Repent for the forgiveness of your sins which is just what Jesus said to preach in Luke 24 and he gives them promise, "You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Promises of blessing, not simply threats of judgment. When we preach the Gospel, we are doing more than threatening judgment if people don't respond and come to faith in Christ, we are promising them blessing if they do. This is so crucial. The call to repentance promises spiritual blessing. It is a call to repent from sin in order to receive God's mercy, God's grace, God's love and eternal life. When we tell people to repent, we should be telling them to turn from sin with the expectation that God will bless them as they do.

Why am I so animated about it? I get animated about a lot of stuff and I want to say this: a dry discourse on repentance is not the biblical call to repentance at all. You can't understand these themes, recognize the lostness of sinners, the threat of judgment and the promise of blessing and what hinges on the response to that message, you can't preach those things in a dispassionate way. You can't see a sinner hell-bound before you and be into the things of the Gospel with them and not have a sense of urgency to plead with them to repent because you are so desperate for them to know the same blessing of God on their lives that he has shown to yours. He can't be indifferent about this, that's the point.

Let me say this as well: an angry denunciation of sin that does not promise blessing to those who hear is not the full biblical call to repentance. Okay, denounce sin, okay, let them know that God's judgment is coming. They need to know that but there should be a tenderness of heart in you and me when we share these things that says, "Oh, but there's blessing. Don't walk away from this blessing, my friend. Don't walk away from it. Don't go back to your sin. Don't seal your judgment even further. God is offering you blessing and the forgiveness of sin if you'll simply come to Christ. I can't bear to see you walk away. Come back! Come back! Don't walk away! And if you walk away, my heart will shed buckets of tears over your lostness."

You see, the call to repentance reminds us that God is a God of mercy. Those of us who know Christ, it should move you and me to hope and to humble gratitude and as you share the Gospel, you want others to share in that mercy with you. You're not indifferent to the way that they respond. It's not enough to say, "Okay, I passed out that tract. Okay, I talked to my neighbor. Done." No. No, not if you understand the call to repentance, not if you understand it's a call to blessing, not if you have any kind of measure of the love of God shed abroad in your heart. Sinners will walk away, I get that, but they should be

slipping on our river of tears as they go because we so love this God who has shown mercy to us and we so love our fellow man that we want them to have that as well. Sinner, I tell you today Jesus Christ will receive you as gladly as he received me. His promise never fails. Repent and put your faith in Christ and know that God has untold spiritual blessing for you as he calls you to Christ. Please come to him.

Thirdly and finally. Repentance is a call to righteousness, it's a call to blessing that we freely share, thirdly: repentance is a call to allegiance. It's a call to allegiance. I'll explain what I mean by that. You see, the call to repentance is so much more than a confrontation about your past conduct. It's more than a reminder that you have sinned in the past. It is that but it's more than that, that's the point. The call to repentance is a call to allegiance to a person. It's more than just behavior management, it's telling you to reorient your heart loyalty to a person, the person of Jesus Christ. The call to repentance tells everyone to reorient their heart so that they would be in loyal loving submission to the person of Jesus Christ. You follow him gladly without limitation to the cost that you would pay.

Matthew 5, I just want to show you two or three verses here. Actually, it's probably more like 10 or 12 but whatever. You gladly follow Christ because you are loyal to him, you love him, you recognize his goodness, you recognize his work on your behalf, you recognize his righteous claim over your life by power of creation and by power of redemption, that he has all manner of right and prerogative over your life and soul. So you are loyal to him, you submit to him, you love him more than life itself.

Look at Matthew 5:11, Jesus said,

11 Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

It's personal to Christ.

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.

This allegiance to Christ, this loyalty, this loving submission to him realizes and it understands, it calculates into the equation that the world may condemn you, your loved ones may mock you and reject you, you realize that you might lose your livelihood over this, and in an increasing sphere of the world, they understand that they may lose their necks because of their love for Christ. What the call to repentance says is that, "That makes no difference to me. That will not diminish my loyalty to Christ. That will not compromise my love to him." It makes no difference because you have an enduring preeminent loyalty to the person of Jesus Christ.

Look at Matthew 6:24 in this light,

24 No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

You cannot serve God in your earthly life, your earthly pursuits. If it comes down to a choice between one or the other, you subordinate earthly pursuits to the call to repentance.

Go back to Matthew 7:24 again, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine," first person singular, "My words and acts on them," there is a loyalty that motivates you to respond to what Christ says. You don't name him as Lord and reject his claim on your life conduct and your life attitudes. No, there is a preeminent loyalty that's involved.

Jesus built on this theme later, Matthew 10:37, turn there as I am about to close. The call to repentance is a call to preeminent loyalty to Christ, of allegiance to him, of surpassing preeminent love for his person, his glorious, wonderful, majestic, uncompromising person, not simply to a rule of conduct. It's so much more than that. Matthew 10:37, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Verse 38, "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." There is the call to repentance. Christ upholds the righteousness of God, he upholds the love of God and calls men to blessing and he says, "All of those gifts can be yours but you must come to me and you must bow the knee to me and I promise my love and blessing upon you. I warn you that judgment will come upon you if you do not and now I call you and I invite you to come to me." And the issues are clear.

Listen, when a sinner hears that message and says, "No. No. I will keep my sin. I will not bow my knee to you. I do not want your blessing." What can we say except that that deserves judgment. Christ has poured out his lifeblood for the forgiveness of sin. He comes with an unconditional offer of love and blessing and forgiveness, complete and immediate forgiveness and says, "Come to me and all of this can be yours. I am the King and I promise you can have a part in my kingdom." And the sinner says, "No, pfft." It's just that crass when a sinner turns away from Christ when he has heard the Gospel. There is no excuse for that. When Christ judges that, he will be righteous in his judgment.

So I ask you one more time, sinner: please come to Christ. Put aside all of your sin. Repent and come to him that he might bless you with forgiveness. Put your faith in him. And for those of you that know him like I do, you've known him for years like I have, let this consideration of repentance bring you to the point where you are weary of your own spiritual indifference. Aren't you tired of being mediocre? Being indifferent to the claims of Christ? Unfaithful in your life? Well, repent and renew your allegiance to Christ. The blessing that he promises to sinners outside his kingdom are all the more true for you that know him. He will cleanse your conscience. He will renew your heart. He will strengthen you to pursue righteousness. Renew your allegiance to this wonderful Savior and go forth in peace because his promise never fails.

Father, we thank you for the call to repentance. Oh, you could have left us to the consequences of our own devices but in your love and grace and mercy you have made a way of salvation to the lost and you beckon your own children to come back into closer fellowship with you. Father, we orient our hearts today right now toward that righteousness. We orient our heart affections toward your blessing and we ask you to spill it upon us, overflowing abundantly, Father, according to the immeasurable bounds of your grace. And Father, as we do that, we ask not just for the blessing and the sense of forgiveness that we desire but preeminently, Father, we give you our allegiance, we give you our loyalty and, Father, we want Christ to be exalted in our lives and we will be loyal, we will be faithful as we go forth from this place now. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.