

Surprisingly Far from Repentance

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Thank you all for being with us here this evening. We're glad to open God's word together once again on a Tuesday evening. We think Tuesday is the night for a midweek service, but that's just my opinion and it's not anything to take seriously. We're very glad to have you with us and I'm taking a little break from our series on the Psalms for the next couple of Tuesday nights to cover something that is designed to kind of augment and prepare us for the things that we're going to be studying on Sunday. I don't often do that. I usually try to keep Sunday and Tuesday separate from one another but the matter of the text that we have coming up for the next couple of Sundays is so very very important that I just felt like we needed to augment it little bit, and it's in Matthew 7. This is not part of the series on the Sermon on the Mount but I'm going to read the text for Sunday just to kind of get it in mind so that we can approach tonight's topic with the proper sense of sobriety.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:21 in a text that I believe, my personal opinion is the most sobering and frightening text in the entire Bible, you might say. In verse 21 he says,

21 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.
22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

There's a certain element of surprise and shock in that text that I think that we have to take very seriously. I know that I take it very seriously as a pastor, being mindful that there will be an outpouring of shock and dismay on the day of judgment by many who expected to go to heaven only to hear the very one they called Lord to send them away and said, "We never knew each other. We had no prior relationship and it is now too late." And Judgment Day, according to Scripture, will have a very uncomfortable, sad element of surprise for many many people, and I fear perhaps for some of you even within the room here today. I can't be a pastor without thinking about these things and hopefully in a proper sense, worrying about them. These things worry me and so I trust that you'll bear with me as I deal with God's word with you in a way that is designed for your good and hopefully can somehow help discharge the responsibility I have before God on the opportunity that's given to me to teach you week by week.

Many will be surprised that Christ rejects them in the end. In the midst of their religion, somehow they missed the Gospel. This is shocking. This is amazing. They were so close. They were so close, in one sense, because they knew about Christ, they called him Lord, they sought to do things in his name, and yet somehow they missed the Gospel. They were so close and yet we see that they were surprisingly far from true repentance. As I've said before, it's one thing to die and go to hell when you were expecting to do that because you consciously reveled in your sin and you wanted no God to reign over you, it's another thing to name the name of Christ and find out that he says in the end, "We never knew each other." The Gospel somehow had been missed.

What is the Gospel? Jesus Christ who is the eternal Son of God, came to earth and lived a perfect life of obedience to his heavenly Father. He offered that life at the cross of Calvary and died for sinners in their place. God accepted the sacrifice of Christ and raised him on the third day to prove that point, and the resurrection shows that Jesus Christ is Lord over all, even over death, and now in the Gospel, Christ offers himself to sinners for the forgiveness of their sins. And how do you respond to that offer of salvation? How do you respond to Christ? Scripture tells us that you must repent and receive Christ personally into your life. In repentance, a sinner recognizes his sin and understands the mercy that God offers to him in Christ, and with a sense of grief and with a sense of hatred of his sin, a sense of self-denial, by faith he turns from sin to receive Christ with a full purpose to pursue obedience to Christ as Lord.

There is this recognition of sin in repentance. There is some measure, there is some kind of grief and regret over sin that is wrapped around that, and there is emotion of the will away from sin toward Christ in order to receive him, and Christ is received by faith alone for salvation, not by anything that we do. Repentance is not something that we do beforehand in order to position ourselves so that we can receive Christ, repentance is a demeanor by which we approach Christ in faith. It's not something that is done apart from faith. Faith and repentance are inextricably linked together like two sides of a coin.

That's the nature of true repentance and what we find when we look at this passage in Matthew is that somehow these people completely miss the boat on repentance. Perhaps they didn't really hate their sin. Perhaps they never really turned to Christ in faith. Perhaps they never understood the terms on which the offer was made at all. Whatever the case, this is tragic. This is an irreversible tragedy of eternal proportions. To think that any sinner would go to hell is a tragedy of immense proportions, that he would go to hell, sent away by Christ shocked and surprised, is unthinkable. It would be unthinkable except that it is revealed to us in Scripture.

Now, here's the thing, beloved, and most of you a part of our church, and those of you that aren't are certainly welcome and we love having you here. It's great to see some of you out. Here's the thing, whenever a pastor comes to preach on these issues, he is mindful of the weight of it and sometimes weighty things are not the easiest things to hear and respond to and think about. You know, there is this tendency, we so want things to be easy and not have difficult consequences, that it is so very easy to push it aside and

say, "I don't even want to think about that." I would rather suspect that that's how a lot of people end up within the scope of verses 21 through 23, "I don't even want to think about it. It's too horrible to contemplate." Now my response to that is this, I think about it just the opposite. It is precisely because it is so horrible that we have to contemplate it. We have to think about it. We have to deal with it. We have to come to grips with what Scripture says. I have, with tongue somewhat in cheek, halfway jokingly said, there are two keys to discernment and just generally speaking in the world as you go through life. This is the greatly simplified version of what I preached on Sunday. My greatly simplified two principles of discernment is this: see what everybody else is doing and then go, secondly, go do the exact opposite, and that's going to serve you pretty well. You see what everybody else is doing and then you say, "Oh, I will do the exact opposite." That will actually take you a lot further than you might think in the spiritual realm. You know, you could look out and see what most other churches are doing and the circus that they use to try to attract people, and they get big crowds and I say, "Great. Take your crowds. I'm going to do the exact opposite." We're going to build a ministry around God's word that has no appeal to the carnal mind and we'll see what God does with that. I would rather see the results of that than just joining in the circus and being another clown in a pulpit. I have no interest, no desire in that. I don't care how isolated that might leave us. I'm happier to be isolated with all of you than to be someplace with a bunch of clowns and a crowd gathered around. That's the way I feel about it.

So what does that have to do with tonight and what we're doing here? The fact that many people would say, "This is too difficult. This is too harsh to contemplate. I don't want to consider it," in my mind tells us that we need to consider it all the more and it's important for us to think this way.

Now when we do that, we know Christ well enough here, I think, to be able to say that there is an embedded blessing, there is a blessing waiting for us if we take this word seriously, and that Christ will meet us not with a deepened sense of despair but with clarity and with discernment and with a sense of joy for those of us that truly know him, and to see the marvel and the wonder of the fact that he delivered us out of that kind of darkness and truly brought us into his kingdom by a sheer act of his amazing grace. That's what comes from this. So what we need to see, what we want to do tonight and a couple of weeks later and around our Sunday message, is we want to distinguish true repentance from its counterfeits. We want to see what true repentance looks like and distinguish it from the false versions that give people a false assurance that lead them ultimately into a very true and real time of judgment. And I think that as we do this, we'll gain some clarity about the nature of true repentance and either be able to examine our own hearts with greater clarity, for one thing, and also to be able to be more effective in the hands of God as ministers of the Gospel as we understand what true repentance looks like.

Now tonight, tonight is a negative message, and what I mean by negative is that we're going to look at some biblical illustrations to see what repentance is not and to see what is not a mark of true repentance, and I think that what you'll find is that even in these two subject matters, this could have been four, I'm saving the last two for another time, is that

even in these two things that we're going to consider, we're going to see how easy it is to fall into the trap of false repentance, to think that there is something real which is not the real repentance of which Scripture describes. Repentance, reminding you again, a sinner recognizing his sin and understanding the mercy of God offered to him in Christ with a sense of grief turns away from his sin in order to embrace Christ by faith with a full desire, a full purpose of mind to pursue obedience to Christ as Lord. That's the kind of repentance that we're talking about and when you contrast some of the biblical examples of people who fell short of it, you start to see what the real thing looks like. So we're going to look at two here this evening, only two, and the first one is this, is that regret alone is not repentance. Regret over sin alone is not repentance and this is a tough one to get your mind around. It would seem that as you're talking about regret over sin, it would be easy to assume that you're talking about true repentance but that is not the case and, beloved, what I want to say to you just plainly here, is that sorrow over sin standing alone by itself is not true repentance. To simply be sorry over sin is not true repentance. That is not an expression of what biblical repentance is, and we see that illustrated in the life of the traitor, Judas Iscariot.

Turn in your Bible, if you would, to Matthew 27. As you know, Judas betrayed Christ and identified him to the Roman authorities at night in exchange for 30 pieces of silver and he betrayed Christ with a kiss, and the Roman soldiers had found their man as Christ voluntarily yielded himself over to their dominion in that moment at Gethsemane. Now, Judas later regretted what he had done and we see that expressed in chapter 27, verse 1. It says, "when morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus to put Him to death; and they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor." Then in verse 3, "Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See to that yourself!'" Verse 5, "And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself." He committed suicide and Scripture calls Judas in different places a son of perdition, Jesus referred to him as a devil in John 6. This was not true repentance and, beloved, self-destruction in the form of suicide is not an act of repentance, it is not a spiritual act at all, and I say this with a lot of sympathy and knowing that this kind of method of dealing with issues is increasingly common, but self-destruction, suicide, is not a spiritual act at all. And Judas shows by his act of self-destruction that he was not truly repentant. He felt regret but he did not repent in the way that we are talking about and the way that Scripture describes repentance. It wasn't a renunciation of self. It was not a returning to Christ. It was not a crying out in mercy to Christ. He felt regret and he ended his life instead. That is not true repentance.

So when you and I think about life and when we hear about people who have committed suicide and all of that, we must think very clearly and precisely in spiritual terms about it. We recognize, we understand that there is something very sad and sorrowful about that and we derive no satisfaction out of it at all, but there should be in none of our minds any sense that this was somehow an act of repentance, that there was some kind of repentant act there, because repentance leads you to Christ, repentance is a turning from sin toward

Christ, and the last thing that Judas did in his act of suicide was to turn to Christ. He felt regret but he did not repent. So while he felt regret over what he had done, he felt regret over the betrayal, that was not the same thing as repentance.

You can see this in another illustration in Scripture if you'll turn to Acts 7. You see, in part you will recognize repentance by its fruit and the fruit of repentance is found in a peaceable trust in Christ, a peaceable turning to Christ, a resignation to Christ and a submission to him, and that was not the mark of Judas at all. In Acts 7, you remember that Stephen was preaching to the Jews and he convicted them of their sin in turning Christ over to crucifixion, and in Acts 7:51, just picking it up at his conclusion, he says in Acts 7:51, he said, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it." Now, I like the courage and the forthrightness of his preaching, don't you?

In verse 54, we see how the men responded. They were certainly convicted as it says in verse 54, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick." They were cut to the quick, they were pierced in their heart by the truth that Stephen had proclaimed against them. They felt the weight of it. They felt the conviction but how did they respond? Did that lead them to repentance? Did it lead them to a turning from sin? A self-renunciation and a turning to Christ? Not at all, "they began gnashing their teeth at him," it says in verse 54. And in verse 55, Stephen "being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!' Having said this, he fell asleep." Notice the result of the conviction that they felt inside. They cried out against Stephen and in a most symbolic and instructive act, they covered their ears so that they would not hear anymore. This is what sinners do. This is what people who fall short of repentance do, they stop listening. They plug their ears. They say, "Na, na, na, I'm not listening anymore." And far from turning from sin, they turned to sin in order to stop the conviction that was being brought up upon their heart. They hated Stephen for the conviction that he brought through his preaching and, therefore, they killed him.

Now, beloved, all that we want to see out of this for this evening is that regret and understanding of guilt is not full repentance. It is not true repentance. They were close, in one sense, in that they saw the issue. They were close but they were surprisingly far away from repentance and this is what I want you to see as we think about Matthew 7, as we think about Judas, as we think about the men who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr: it's sobering, to me at least, it's sobering to recognize that men could be so close

to the real thing. "Lord, Lord!" "Depart from me, I never knew you." Judas feeling remorse and even casting away the silver that he had taken to betray innocent blood, but then he goes out and he hangs himself. Stephen rightly convicts the Jews and they understand it so much that they are cut to the heart, and yet the response is one of greater sin. It turns to murder rather than turning to Christ. Judas turned to suicide rather than turning to Christ in mercy. So we have to understand that the mere bare fact of feeling guilty over sin is not true repentance because it stops short of turning to Christ.

Now this tells us many things. A man who feels, who somewhere in the corner of his heart no matter what he professes outwardly, a man who in his heart feels satisfied with his own self-righteousness, is a man who is not repentant no matter how much he talks about God or Jesus or wanting to do the right thing. If you have a settled sense of self-righteousness, you are not repentant, you are not in Christ, you are outside of the kingdom. This is serious. Someone who has heard of Christ again and again and again and begins to inwardly, if not outwardly, roll their eyes and, "Here it comes again," no matter what they say about themselves, that inward dissatisfaction, resistance, indifference of pushing away, when that is a settled mark of a heart, they are not a Christian no matter how often they show up at church, no matter how often they tag along with somebody else. You see, there is a genuine sincerity to true repentance of a genuine hatred for sin and a genuine turning to Christ that is without guile, that is without pretense, that is full of sincerity and saying, "I really do want to leave my sin behind. I really do want to receive Christ." There is a reality to it and yet it is a reality that goes beyond mere regret.

You see, beloved, and I have in mind no one in particular as I say this, but it's just important to say and so I'm going to use the second person singular, "you." If you simply regret the consequences of your sin and and it goes no further, that's not real repentance. Lots of people can regret the fact that they are suffering the consequences of their wrongdoing. Prisons are filled with people like this who regret the fact that they were caught, who regret the fact that they are being punished, but it stops short of a self-renunciation in order to embrace Christ fully as Lord. So we should not confuse feelings of guilt standing alone as being that which is the expression and the fullness of repentance. Repentance involves a sorrow over sin, to be sure it involves a recognition, "Yes, I'm a wrongdoer. Yes, I'm a sinner. Yes, I have broken God's law." It involves that but it goes further than that to a turning to Christ, and those two things, while intimately related, cannot be separated.

So we see in Judas and in the Jews, that they were surprisingly far from repentance even though in our superficial day and age, we can look and say, "Look, there are spiritual motions going on in their heart." No, no, repentance can be known in part by its fruit. It can be known in part by its fruit, what comes afterwards, and in Matthew 3, I believe it is, in Matthew 3, you can turn there with me, in Matthew 3, John saw and this is again, a good illustration of falling short of true repentance, John the Baptist saw, Matthew 3:7, John the Baptist saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, and you would think, "Oh, this is good. They must be repentant. They've got spiritual desires. They're coming to the leader seeking to submit themselves to him." And John the Baptist

says, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" And he challenges them and says, "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance." Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. If there is repentance, it can be known by the fruit that follows. Feelings of guilt followed by suicide is not true repentance, it's not biblical repentance, it's not the change of mind, it's not the change and redirection of life. It's a full preoccupation with self that is not the fruit of true repentance. So you and I as biblical Christians need to be able to distinguish these things in our minds.

Now secondly tonight, for this evening, on another side of the spectrum, you could say. Point 2: a desire for signs is not repentance. A desire for miraculous things, a desire to see, in so many words to see God do something spectacular is no mark of true repentance. It's not a mark of anything spiritual necessarily at all. In our Christian culture where charismatic influence is so strong, we need to pay particular heed to this. This is another common misconception that we need to clear up. Beloved, desires for the supernatural are no sign of repentance.

Let's take it another step further on another matter that I'm planning to teach on before too very long. I have a stack of about 10 different messages that I have inside me waiting to get out. Desires to hear God speak to you personally and individually is not a sign of repentance. That's not a healthy spiritual sign at all, and we see evidence of these things in the teaching of our Lord.

You're in the book of Matthew, I believe, turn to Matthew 12. Jesus speaks very very clearly on this and we see it illustrated in many different ways and it's not simply the desire for signs is not a healthy spiritual sign, that's one aspect of it, it's also for us to understand that miraculous signs are not that which produces true repentance according to Scripture either. So there is kind of a dual track that you run on there.

Matthew 12:38, "some of the scribes and Pharisees said to [Jesus], 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.'" And what did Jesus say? How did he diagnose that sign that they wanted and their desire for a sign? He says in verse 39, "But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet.'" He said, "Your desire for a sign when I am here teaching you is a sign of wickedness. It is a sign that you are trying to define the terms by which God will reveal himself to you rather than taking, accepting, believing and submitting to the revelation that he has actually given."

He says in verse 40, "for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." He says, "You remember the men of Nineveh and how they repented at the preaching of Jonah? They repented. Here I am," Jesus says, "greater than Jonah, preaching repentance and you won't repent at my word. People outside the chosen covenant nation repented at lesser preaching. You have greater preaching and you refuse to repent. That generation will rise up at judgment and condemn you." Their craving,

their desire for a sign was not a mark of spiritual health, it was a mark of spiritual rebellion, of spiritual decay, of spiritual rot.

And he repeats and doubles up on the point in verse 42 when he says, "The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here." In 1 Kings, the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon and came to see and to hear and brought tribute. Here Jesus is on the scene and they are not interested in what he has to say. They are demanding something different than what he is offering and presenting to them. Jesus says, "That Queen of Sheba will rise up in judgment and condemn you." Their desire for signs was not a mark of spiritual health. It was not a mark of anything good. It certainly was not, their desires for the supernatural were certainly no sign of repentance.

Now I realize that our charismatic friends like to say, "Well, if people see signs, they will believe. You know, they just need to see a manifestation of God's power and they'll necessarily respond because it will be undeniable to them." Well, that's not true. That is not accurate. That is not consistent with Scripture as we will see illustrated in just a moment.

Before we go there, I want to point your attention to Luke 10 as well. Luke 10:13, Jesus again pronouncing judgment on the cities, other cities, that heard his preaching, saw his ministry, and what was the outcome for them? He says in verse 13, "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you." Jesus comes to these cities and says, "You have seen miracles and you have refused to repent." Jesus says, "If others in another time and place had seen these things, they would have repented but you didn't." The point being here that the signs even of Jesus himself, did not produce repentance in his hearers. It did not even generate within them a desire for repentance. They simply hardened their heart to it all the more.

You're in the Gospel of Luke, let's look at Luke 16 and see something else about it that gives us a clue to the overall picture in the familiar story of the rich man and Lazarus. What we want to see in this passage that we're about to read is that even special, you could say supernatural messengers, cannot produce repentance. It's not about the realm of the supernatural as it is manifested in external signs that produces or generates or guarantees repentance. There is no such thing.

So in Luke 16:19, the familiarity of the story will help us here. Jesus says, "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and

Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'" Let's pause there for just a moment. Abraham tells him, "My child, your doom is sealed. There is no altering your condition. This cannot be changed. You had your good things in life and now you find yourself in agony and it is fixed. There is a chasm between us so that this cannot be bridged."

Now in verse 27, we see the rich man resigned to his own fate but he seeks to warn his loved ones who are still alive. From the grave, he seeks to protect them and he says in verse 27, "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house--for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'" This is really critical for you to see and to understand in the context of what we're talking about here. Jesus presents this man, articulating to Abraham a theology, a theology that says if Lazarus could go from the dead and preach to his brothers, his brothers would hear the message; because Lazarus was a supernatural envoy of God, they would necessarily see and understand and repent in response and, therefore, not enter into judgment. Those are his presuppositions. He has a hold theology built around the fact that what his brothers needed was to hear from a supernatural resurrected envoy from God who could warn them and that if they only had that, if they only had that, they would necessarily repent and receive salvation. But beloved, his entire thinking, even though it mirrors what we see around us now 2,000 years later, his entire thinking, everything was wrong about his thinking.

All of his presuppositions were entirely mistaken and you see that in Abraham's response in verse 29, "Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'" He said, "They've got the Scriptures. They have everything they need." And this rich man who shows that he's not repentant even in torment says in verse 30, "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" Nail in the coffin. This is screwed down tight. What Abraham says to him is, "The Scriptures are sufficient to lead them to repentance." He says, "If they won't listen to the higher authority, something lesser, something miraculous is not going to help them." And you and I must have this same thinking very clear in our minds, a twofold positive and negative sense, from a negative sense, recognizing that it is folly to believe that the human heart can be changed by external signs that occur before them, even if they were real, that the presupposition of this man in Hades was, "If they only saw a resurrected man, they would repent. If only someone resurrected would make the message known to them, they would repent." And Abraham says, "No, that's not true. If they won't listen to Scripture, they won't listen to anything."

Part of the positive way that you can identify true repentance is a willingness to hear and to heed the word of God. True repentance produces that in the heart of a genuine believer

and someone who will not hear the word of God is showing that they have not been saved at all, no matter what kind of miracles they think they've experienced, no matter what else they say by way of experience, no matter how much they say that God has spoken to them directly. All of those things are counterfeits that have deception embedded in them and it's wrapped in deception and leads people away from the word of God rather than into the word of God. Why is it that books like "Jesus Calling" can sell millions of copies? If someone says that, "Jesus has spoken to me and now Jesus is speaking directly to you"? It's because people want to bypass Scripture. True repentance, true faith that leads to true salvation, does not bypass Scripture and what you find in true repentance is true repentance produces and has embedded in its very seed form, it has embedded in it a teachable and receptive attitude toward the word of God, a teachable and receptive attitude toward the 66 books of the Bible.

So Abraham tells this rich man, "They have the word of God. Let them hear it." He says, "They won't listen to that! Send them something else!" And Abraham says, "Nothing else will help." One writer, a man from the last century named William Douglas Chamberlain said this and it is such a perceptive quote, I may read it twice. "Disposition to unbelief is not overcome by overwhelming evidence, even the evidence which a man risen from the dead could offer." I'll say it again. I like this quote, so humor me as you hear it twice. "Disposition to unbelief is not overcome by overwhelming evidence, even the evidence which a man risen from the dead could offer."

Beloved, what we're dealing with and part of what the problem is in dealing with unsaved people and dealing with an unsaved unregenerate heart, we underestimate how dead in sin the unsaved man is. We think that there is something in a dead heart that can somehow respond if only the right external stimulus is brought to it. So we have friends who will schedule revival meetings and bring in the revival speaker, and if we just set the conditions right and get the right man speaking, we can bring about a revival that way and we can bring about repentance if we just set the conditions, the external conditions right. This is the exact same thing that the seeker friendly movement says and believes. If we just set the conditions right and we make it appealing and we make it comfortable, then they'll come and they will hear and they will respond, never mind the word of God in the process. It's the same thing that charismatics do when they call for their healing services and heal people of back pain and headaches, never somehow making it to children's hospitals and actually working a real gift of healing, which I think says all you need to know about it. It's always on their terms and their environment. But somewhere in their mind is this distorted thinking that if they could just see something miraculous, then they would turn and believe. There is a common thread through the revival mindset, through the seeker sensitive mindset, through the charismatic mindset, that if we just bring the right external conditions upon people, they will believe. It's an utter failure to realize that the problem is within, that there is a dead heart, and the only thing that can bring life to a dead heart is the word of God applied with power by the Holy Spirit to that person's life. Only in the proclamation of Christ crucified and an invitation by a loving, gentle, gracious, patient Father saying, "Come to my Son and be saved." That is the terms in which, that is the vehicle which God uses to bring about repentance. The people don't have the time or the patience or the desire for the word of God and so they shove it aside

and say, "Let's do something else instead. Father Abraham, send them a man from the dead and they'll believe." And the Bible says, "No, that's not it." If men will not heed Scripture, wonderful signs will not help them. Free coffee and a comfortable lobby will not make them more inclined to the Gospel.

What is it that Scripture says produces the real faith? What is it that generates real faith? Romans 10:17, "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. True repentance finds its soil, true repentance is rooted in a reverent teachable response to Scripture and if a man is not teachable and reverent in response to Scripture, there is a fundamental barrier to true repentance until God turns his heart and external things that we do cannot overcome that.

It reminds me of the hymn that we sometimes sing, and I didn't write it in my notes and I'm about to forget all about it, but the line in the hymn that says, "All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down. Brethren, pray and holy manna will be spread all around. Brethren, we have met to worship." You can see my memory kicking in, can't you? "Brethren, we have met to worship and adore the Lord our God. Will you pray with all your power while we try to preach the word?" Pleading with the people of God to pray and ask God to bless and attend the preaching of his word because it is in that preaching and in the proclamation of truth that God uses to produce faith in the hearts of the unbelieving. So the hymn writer says, "Won't you join us in prayer while we try to preach the word?"

So we realize a twin reality may be a triplet reality depending on how it comes. When you are evangelizing your friends and your loved ones and you know that they are not Christians, understand that you're dealing with someone who is really dead in sin. There is no such thing as a lock-sure argument that will guarantee that they will repent and come to Christ. That does not exist. If it did, the church would save everybody. We are dependent on a power outside of ourselves. We are dependent on the Spirit of God to help us and if the Spirit doesn't help us, then we don't have the power to save the people to whom we speak. That's how dead in sin they are. That's how dependent we are in our proclamation of Christ. We need divine power to assist us or we are wasting our time.

So with those things in mind, we're just mindful of the fact that we have to beware of counterfeits, and as a church, as Christians, as individuals, we have to realize, "Okay, I have to stake everything on this word. I stake everything on the 66 books of the Bible. I depend entirely upon the work of the Holy Spirit to work in that dead heart because I know I can't do it on my own." And therefore if someone is converted under your witness or if someone is converted under my preaching, we understand that God gets all of the glory because we have no power to do that on our own. That's why I have no interest, not that there's much to count, to my ongoing sorrow, I have no interest in the conversations that some people will engage in, and I've mentioned this in the past. People came in the early days of our church, told me, "We preached last night and we converted 34 people." You converted no one, my friend, and why are you standing there as if you are taking credit for it by counting numbers and then boasting before men?

No, we are mindful of our weakness. We are mindful of our dependence and we embrace that. We accept that and we trust that in time and place and your witness and in what we do together as a church, that in time God will be pleased to bring about a harvest of souls in response to the proclamation of his word. But if he tarries and we don't see that, do you know what we'll do? We'll just keep doing what we're doing. It's the only way forward. Our philosophy of ministry is not for sale. It's not up for change. We believe in the power of the word and we believe that repentant people will respond to the word of God and those who refuse the word of God are refusing the only thing, they are stepping on the only air hose that can give them spiritual oxygen. And why would we change what we do simply because their response is not there when somebody refuses to repent?

Well, we'll have much more to say about this in future weeks. We're just kind of getting started on this. Like I say, I had a whole lot more that I wanted to say but I decided to save it for later. The thing that we would say for now is: beware of counterfeits and may God help us to know Christ and to make him known.

Let's pray.

Father, we pray for each one here, that if in hearing these things we could say, "Yes, real repentance resides in my heart. I have turned from sin and I have embraced Christ and I am teachable and responsive to the word of God," and Father, for that we would give you all of the glory, realizing that repentance is a gift that you yourself give. Father, for those that would hear and say, "That's not me," Lord, we pray that you would bring about a softening of their heart that they might turn and come to Christ truly. Father, we are mindful of that, that people walk in self-deception. We would not have one under the sound of our voice dwelling in that self-deception shocked at the end of the age, being sent away from the one they thought they knew. O Father, spare us by your mercy of such a miserable fate and lead us all safely into your heavenly kingdom. Father, we pray that you would lead us not into temptation but that you would deliver us from evil, deliver us from our own evil unrepentant hearts. Father, may each one under the sound of our voice instead of hearing the words, "Depart," Father, may each one under the sound of our voice hear those blessed words, "Yes, enter into the joy of your Master." Help us to that end and, Father, attend the evangelism that goes out through many here tonight, attend the preaching of the word through this church, through this pulpit, and accomplish supernatural things in the conversion of sinners that you alone can do. And Father, when that happens, Father, we pledge to you that we will give you all the glory for it and reserve none of it for ourselves. We simply want to be instruments in your hand for you to sound at your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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