

The Apostles' Command to Repent

Command to Repent

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Preached on: Sunday, March 21, 2021

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Well, I invite you to turn in your Bible to the gospel of Matthew 25. We'll get there eventually, not right away but eventually we will turn there. Last week, I preached a message on the Lord's command to repent taken from Matthew 4:17, and we worked our way through some gospels texts indicating the Lord called on men to repent and believe in the gospel. The gospel, what is the gospel? Well, as we said last time and I'm happy to repeat myself for repetition is the key to learning, the gospel tells us that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. The gospel is a word of good news and it tells us that Christ came from heaven and to earth in order to live a perfect life and he gave that life, he sacrificed that life on the cruel cross of Calvary as a sacrifice to God for guilty sinners to turn away his wrath against them. He was buried, three days later he was raised from the dead and his resurrection shows that he is Lord over all because no one else has conquered death like he has. Christ. some 40 days later. ascended into heaven. Scripture tells us that there he stands and sits, as it were, at the right hand of God interceding for his people with the plan to one day return for them and to execute judgment on this guilty world. So the gospel tells us the good news that God has done something for sinners just like you, he has taken sin at the cross, paid for it in full, and now offers forgiveness and eternal life freely to those who would hear, and the question is what is the response, how is it that I receive and enter into that eternal life and forgiveness because Scripture makes it very very plain that not all men will be saved, and in a room of this size, it grieves my heart to recognize that not all will be saved most likely even in this room ultimately, and so it becomes urgent for us to know and to understand what is it that God commands sinners to do in order that they might receive the benefit of the saving work of Jesus Christ that he accomplished once for all at the cross. Well, as we saw last time, the Lord calls men to repentance. He said, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," Matthew 4:17. So what the preacher of the gospel does is he declares the good news about what Christ has accomplished and then he calls men and women, boys and girls to repentance. We are calling you to turn from your sin and to serve Christ in newness of life.

Now repentance, as we said last time and I'm going to repeat a quote for the benefit of people who weren't here last time, repentance is a serious change of mind and heart. It is not a flippant matter and, in one sense, I sympathize with the many lost people who have been under the sound of churches that make everything light and happy and frivolous and entertaining because when you're under the sound of that kind of teaching, it's very very difficult if not impossible to understand that the call of the gospel is serious, it's earnest,

it's making a call and a demand on the entirety of your person, heart, mind, soul and spirit. It is a serious change of mind and heart, is what repentance is.

Last week I quoted from Bishop Ryle and his expository reflections on Matthew and he said this about repentance, he said and I quote, "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," you've all seen that in the waters of baptism from the two ladies, right? You saw a living testimony of what heartfelt confession looks like. "... 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." And what we saw last time from Matthew 4:17, we saw four aspects of genuine repentance, and the goal here and the goal last week was this, was to help you understand what real repentance is but to move beyond that mental acquisition of understanding and to examine and probe your own heart to say, "Have I repented like that? Do I see sin and do I understand repentance like the Lord proclaimed it?"

And what were those aspects? Well, it moves through different aspects of the human personality and the human existence. There's a mental aspect to it. There's a knowledge of sin. There is a thoroughgoing understanding that you are a sinner, lost, having broken God's law and now separated from him, and you understand that to be true of yourself. You do away with any claim of self-righteousness or, "I'm a pretty good person. You know, I'm better than the guy next to me." That has nothing to do with anything in the eyes of God, the only question is whether you have broken God's law or not and the teaching of repentance says that you have, and that you know that and you understand it and you embrace it and you make that confession freely in your heart, you make it freely to men, there is no protection of self-righteousness at all in true repentance.

So there's a knowledge of sin. We saw that there is a sorrow for sin, a sorrow over sin. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." It's talking about a mourning, a grief, a sense of conviction deep in your heart that says, "Yes, not only have I broken God's law but that grieves me." And that's an important distinction for us to keep in mind because we all know either persons who have said this or you've read it, you've seen people living this kind of life, people who make jokes about, "Yes, I'm a sinner and, yes, at least I'll be in hell with all of my drinking buddies." That is so foreign to repentance that it can't, that you just have to understand that simply a mental acknowledgment of sin is followed naturally in God's work by a sorrow over sin. Sin no longer is a matter of jesting, no longer a matter of entertainment, no longer something that you welcome and hold close to your bosom. It's something that you hate and you grieve over the fact that you were like that. I've said in times past just to illustrate it, I've said this many many years ago and it's still true today. If the old Don Green walked into this worship center, obviously that's not going to happen, but if the old Don Green walked into the worship center, I would want to have a ball bat and beat him to death because I hate him that much. I hate so much what I used to be that I want no quarter to be given to a resurrection of that old man and that old me because it grieves me to think that's what I was like, the blasphemer and the drunk and all of the godlessness of my life

of spurning God's word and using prayer only as a means to get something that I wanted. It's awful to me to think that that's once what I was. I grieve over that.

So there's this knowledge, there is this sorrow over sin that moves into your will, into your volition, that causes you to turn your life, to reorient your life, to reject the world, to reject the old you and say, "I want to turn away from that and to follow after Christ." There's this turning, profound turning. You know, some of the dispensational writers tried to reduce it simply to a mental change of mind, that repentance is just changing your mind about who Christ is. That's a completely inadequate understanding of repentance. Repentance is repentance from sin and it involves grief and a turn of the will away from it. This is all what we saw last week and the final of the four things that we said last week is that repentance is and kind of blending repentance and faith together, in true repentance there is a turning away from sin and a turning toward Christ, receiving him, resting in him, leaving sin behind in order to follow after Christ. That's the idea, and so repentance turns from sin to Christ and we'll see that in one of the passages that we read soon enough.

Now here's a fair question: why would we, why would I preach on repentance these two weeks, last Sunday and this Sunday? Why would I do that? It's not like we haven't taught on repentance before at Truth Community Church, and also I recognize that most of you are here because in one way or another you love the Bible, you have been born again, you have repented, and so why trouble ourselves with that? Why not try to speculate on the timing of the rapture, something that would really draw people in, you know? Why not do that? Why not speculate about end times events? Well, there are a ton of reasons for that but let me just put it in simple terms like this. Let's say, I don't know, let's say that there are 250 people in the church building today, and that 80% of you are Christians, 80%, you know the old 80/20 rule. Well, do you know what that would mean, the implications of that for the 20%? That would mean that 50 of you are not, that 50 of you are on the outside of salvation looking in, wandering in darkness, loving your sin and refusing the pleas of those who love you to consider Christ. Look, I can't bear the thought of that without doing what's in my power to try to somehow address it. If you 50 died tonight, Christ would turn you away in an eternal act of unspeakable consequence.

I asked you to turn to Matthew 25, now look at verse 41 here. Matthew 25:41. We just have to take seriously what is at stake in the proclamation of the gospel. This is a matter of eternal consequence. We are not talking about earthly politics. We are not talking about wearing masks or social distancing. All of that stuff is going to pass away and all of the people that are making laws and enforcing them and all of that stuff, they're going to be dead and gone in a few decades if not sooner, and they're all going to be forgotten and none of that stuff is going to be remembered. So we're not wasting our time on such earthly trivialities, we're talking about the eternal state and the eternal destination of your soul. So that's what we're focused on, that's what we care about here today. This is for the sake of your soul and to just recognize what Jesus said would happen on the day of judgment to those that have rejected the gospel.

Look at verse 41, Matthew 25:41, in fearsome words, fearful words, sorrowful words, "He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'" There will be a final climactic separation at the command of Christ himself where you as a lost sinner are sent away accursed into eternal fire with your eternal home, so to speak, to be with Satan and his demonic hosts. And Jesus says that it will be eternal, it will be everlasting. There is no purgatory to burn your way out of it after a few thousand years. It's everlasting. Jesus said in verse 46, look at it there with me, "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." There's a fork in the road coming. Christ will separate the sheep from the goats. The goats, the unsaved will enter into this eternal fire of eternal suffering as the just punishment from God for all of their sins against him. By contrast, those of us who Christ has saved will enter into eternal life. Notice that both of them are eternal. The punishment is eternal, the life is eternal. They are both everlasting. There is no such thing as annihilation and that you will be punished and then you will cease to exist, no longer to feel anything. That's not what Scripture teaches. It's eternal.

So my friends, what I trust that you see are that the consequences of what we're discussing here today from God's word, the consequences are far-reaching and they are personal, they are personal to each one of you, and that's why those of us that Christ has saved, we're so grateful to him to realize that he interceded for sinners, that while we were yet sinners, he died for us, that his death has reconciled us to God and we realize that we have been delivered from so great a peril as death. But for you other 50, we are here today to plead with you to hear the word of God and to respond to it in repentance.

Now this is all kind of review of what we said last time. Jesus ascended into heaven but he gave his disciples a commission. He told them to, "Go and teach the nations all that I have commanded you to teach." In Luke 24, he said, "Repentance for the forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed to all of the nations." And somehow in the mind of God and in the purpose of God, he has appointed this moment for us to hear these things afresh from his word. Now the question is this, the question is this: Jesus as we saw clearly last time, Jesus preached repentance and now the question is having told his disciples to go out and preach, what was their message? Did it correspond to the teaching of Jesus on repentance? And that's what I want to walk through here with you today.

Turn over to the book of Acts. As the gospel went forth after the ascension of Christ, the apostles were preaching to their contemporaries and what did they say as they proclaimed Christ, his death and resurrection? How did he call upon men to respond? What does the great Apostle Peter have to say about it? Look at Acts 2:38, actually we'll go to verse 37. Peter declared in verse 36, "know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ this Jesus whom you crucified." He was preaching the exact same Christ that we are proclaiming to you today. It is the exact same Christ. Now verse 37, when his audience heard this, heard that they were responsible for the crucifixion of the Messiah, that's not a good place to be, "they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" Having heard the message, having recognized that we are guilty before God, what shall we do? And you 50 that are here today, I'm making the number up but you understand why I'm doing this, the 50 of you

here should be asking that same question, "What shall I do? What shall we do in response to our guilt before this holy God?" What did Peter answer? Verse 38, he said, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The gospel is a command to repent, repentance being the outward symbol of the inner work of God in your heart, and the gospel is also a promise from God. There is a promise in the gospel that says if you will simply repent and believe in Christ, God will shower his blessings on you. The Holy Spirit will come to you and help you and change you and seal you and make you his own, and to be in Christ and to be secure in heaven forever and ever, amen. It's a command and it's a promise, but at the core of the command is, "Repent."

It wasn't the only time that Peter said this. Look at chapter 3, verse 17. Peter says, "now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away," there's the command and then the promise, "in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you." Repent and there's a promise that you'll be blessed if you do.

So you see, the proclamation of the gospel isn't simply a threat of judgment, it's a promise of blessing to those who would hear and repent and believe. And just to clarify one thing here before I go any further, I should have said this back at the start, the apostles who preached, there is no distinction between their authority and the authority of Christ himself because the apostles are appointed by Christ, they were commissioned by Christ to preach exactly what Christ told them to preach, and we have recorded for us by the work of the Holy Spirit in the pages of Scripture exactly what they said so that what the apostles said are equally the word of God as much as the word of the Lord Jesus Christ was because they were speaking under the influence of God the Holy Spirit, they were commissioned and authorized by Christ to do this, and so you should not see any distinction between the authority of the black letters in your Bible, and if you have a red letter Bible, the red letters of the Bible. They are equally the word of God and we should not try to distinguish between the two, and part of what we're doing here is showing that the work of Christ and the word of Christ on repentance is identical to what his apostles preached.

So Acts 5 with that little cul-de-sac detour taken. Acts 5:30. Peter and the apostles said, "We must obey God rather than men." Verse 30, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross." Do you see the factual historical statements here? The gospel is premised on historical facts. It's not an ethical theory. It's not a philosophical speculation. It is rooted in time and space historical realities the Scripture records and interprets for us.

So in verse 31, Peter said, "He," meaning Jesus Christ, "is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him." You know, I just get lost in the wonder of the gospel and

I get lost in the privilege of being able to declare such wonderful things. God has done a work and God promises everyone who believes without distinction, everyone who believes can enter into this forgiveness and receive the Holy Spirit, have their lives transformed and be delivered from sin, Satan and hell into blessing and eternal life, and there is nothing in God that makes him unwilling for any of you to enter into that. He promises this blessing to everyone who will hear. Do you know what that means? That means that if any one of you walk out of this room unsaved, you alone are responsible for it because God has declared his promises, his saving intention for everyone who repents and believes in Christ, all of these promises can belong to you. So if you refuse that, it's not God's fault. If you reject that and refuse to bend the knee, you alone are responsible. And Scripture makes it plain that the severest punishment in hell is reserved for those who heard the gospel, heard the promise of peace and would not have it, would not have Christ. So this is all pretty serious.

So we've seen three passages with Peter. Repent. Repent. Repent. Well, let's keep going in the book of Acts. The first 12 chapters of Acts kind of focus on Peter and his ministry, the last chapters, 13 through 28, focus more on the Apostle Paul. What does the great Apostle Paul have to say about this? What marked his teaching? Well, look at Acts 14:14. There was a crowd that thought Paul was some kind of god sent from heaven. He rejected that and in verse 14 it says, "when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their robes and rushed out into the crowd, crying out and saying, 'Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things,' turn from their idolatry, 'to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.'" He says, "I'm proclaiming a gospel, turn from your former life, turn to the living God who has made Himself known in Christ." It's the exact same proclamation.

Look at chapter 17, chapter 17, verse 30, beginning in verse 29 Paul said, "we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man." He's premising his argument here on the second commandment about making no graven images and religions that are premised on lots of statues or paintings and all of the veneration is designed to go through the images, all of that is condemned by Scripture, my friends, because they cannot possibly represent the true nature of God. So God commands us not to worship through images, and what Paul says in verse 30 in consequence of that, he shows the mercy of God and he says, "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent." That's pretty comprehensive. In every century, in every culture, in every place, the gospel is the same. We don't need one for blacks, we don't need one for whites, we don't need one for women, we don't need one for any other kind of subgroup. It's the same gospel to all men everywhere and the gospel is that all people everywhere should repent.

Why? Verse 31, "because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness." That's just what I read to you from Matthew 25, right? This is not complicated. These things are open and laid bare. "He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having

furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." There is no other Savior. There is no other religion, so to speak, using that term broadly as the way 19th century guys used to use it, there is no other religion than the true religion of biblical Christianity. Everything else is a false road that leads to destruction. And you know that that's true, God has authenticated his message by raising Christ from the dead. There is no resurrected Buddha or Mary Baker Eddy, or any of these other false teachers, Ellen White, or any of these other false teachers, Joseph Smith, they're all dead and buried. Mohammad, dead and buried. Christ, buried but his body is not there. He's resurrected, and that is the proof, that is the authenticating stamp of God on the message that the apostles and Christ himself preached. He did something miraculous to authenticate it, he raised Christ from the dead.

Now chapter 20 of Acts. You see this woven through, you see this thread running through the entire book of Acts. Acts 20:20, Paul said in verse 18, he said, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying," right there in those two words, solemnly testifying, repudiating all of the silly frivolous religion of American culture because it's solemn and it's a testimony, "testifying to both Jews and Greeks," a comprehensive view of humanity, Jews and non-Jews of, what? "Of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

So three sermons from Peter, three sermons from Paul, all of them emphasizing this repentance of which we have been speaking. It should be clear in your mind that this is the biblical emphasis of how to respond to the gospel. Now I say this what I'm about to say with a measure of sympathy to a lot of people. Because repentance is not freely and loudly proclaimed in many pulpits, to hear it for the first time, perhaps some of you really hearing this for the first time, it sounds foreign and it almost becomes suspect because you haven't heard it before, you haven't heard this emphasis before, and the reason that we went through six passages in the book of Acts is to show you the biblical emphasis of it. Whatever else you do, my friends, don't be suspicious of Scripture. If Scripture is saying things about how to receive the forgiveness of your sins that you've never heard before, let me give you a piece of advice: don't be suspicious of the Bible, start to be suspicious of those who have not told you this in their capacity as being spiritual teachers. That's the problem. The Bible is clear. The Bible says it repeatedly. If the voice, if the theme of repentance is not heard loudly in certain places, it doesn't mean that repentance is somehow a strange new doctrine, it means that a different message is being preached and it grieves me to say that but I have this 60 minute period to look out for the welfare of your souls and that's what I'm trying to do in reliance on the Holy Spirit.

Now my friends, let me ask you, let me ask a question to get us into our four points for this morning. This is one of those great times where the outline for me is really easy because it's the same outline as last week, and I'm doing it that way to make a point. Last week, we said that repentance to Jesus meant a knowledge of sin, sorrow over sin, turning from sin, and a new commitment to Christ. That's repentance according to Jesus. Do you

know what repentance according to the apostles is? Knowledge of sin, sorrow over sin, turning from sin, commitment to Christ, perfect equivalency of the themes and the aspects of repentance that the apostles emphasized as well as our Lord. It's exactly what we would expect if the apostles were his authorized representatives, and they were.

So we're going to go through this rather quickly here, famous last words with me, I know, but what did repentance mean to the apostles? We'll focus on the Apostle Paul. What's involved in repentance? Well, in Paul you see in his writings, you see him emphasizing the knowledge of sin, you see him emphasizing point 1 today, the knowledge of sin. And if you'll turn to Romans 3 you'll see this clear enough spoken in universal terms without exceptions. The knowledge of sin. Paul taught that men should understand that they are guilty sinners before God, that there should be a mental recognition of that fact, Romans 3:9. And again, you see the absolutely inclusive nature of it all. There is no one outside the bounds of what Scripture says. Scripture convicts us all in the same way.

Romans 3:9, "What then? Are we Jews better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.'" And in verse 23, Paul says, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That's the testimony of Scripture, all under sin, you know, and sometimes I'll say it like this, I know a lot about all of you even if I don't know you personally by name, I know a lot about you simply because I read my Bible and you can know a lot about me in return. We're all sinners. None of us are righteous in our own. None of us left to our own would have ever sought after God. We were useless for the purposes of God in our unsaved state. We did not do good. There wasn't even a one of us that was like that. And look at the emphasis as you read this, as you go back and read it this afternoon, especially you 50 that I'm particularly talking to. None. None. None. All. None. Not even one. The Scripture closes us up and shuts us out from any claim of self-righteousness whatsoever. We cannot read Scripture, say we believe Scripture and simultaneously believe that, "I'm a pretty good person and God ought to take me into heaven when I die as a result of that." We're excluded from that because both Christ and the apostles have taught us to understand that we are sinners, spiritually bankrupt. It's what Jesus taught. It's what the apostles taught.

So I ask you this morning, my dear dear friends, my dear dear friends, I ask you whether you have turned to Christ with that understanding in your mind, "I am a broken ruined sinner. I am spiritually bankrupt. There is nothing good in me. I am full of sin. I am full of godlessness." Have you turned to Christ like that, I ask you, because that's the first aspect of true repentance, is this unreserved, unqualified acknowledgment and owning of your sin.

Well secondly, we see the Apostle Paul teaching us about sorrow over sin as well. Sorrow over sin. There's an emotional aspect to true repentance. Now before I go any further, it doesn't mean that everybody that's repentant is going to be loudly, sincerely weeping and wailing and screaming from the roof, "I'm a sinner, sinner, sinner!" There's

different aspects to it and we shouldn't hold up, you know, some of the Puritan examples of that kind of emotional response to sin as the pattern that everyone must follow, that expressive nature of things, but at the same time there will be in a truly repentant person some sense of godly sorrow over their sin, that even if you're the quiet person and you retreat into your room and rather than demonstrating it to all, in your heart of hearts you're saying, "Oh, what have I done? What kind of man am I? What kind of woman am I? O God, have mercy on me!" Somewhere something in you recognizing this life of sin, this principle of sin in you and saying, "I reject that. I do not want that. I reject it. I turn away from it." Something showing some kind of inner revulsion at what you used to be, that's true repentance, one aspect of it.

Look over at 2 Corinthians 7. We speak these things not only in your sight but in the sight of God as we speak this morning and we ask the Spirit of God to bear witness to your own heart of the truth of the things that we say because I can't force this into you. No man can redeem his brother, all the preacher can do is proclaim it and trust the Spirit to use it. 2 Corinthians 7, the Apostle Paul writing to this church at Corinth, he says, "I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter." This is a sorrow that is more than saying, "I'm sorry I got caught," it's a response to sin that does more than chafe against the consequences that it has brought into your life, it's a sorrow sufficient to say, "I reject that." You can hate the consequences and still love your sin, beloved. Repentance hates the sin enough to leave it behind and turn away from it. That's the difference. Yeah, you know, you cannot be repentant and say, "Yes, I know I'm a sinner and I'm going to keep doing it." That's not repentance.

So I ask you whether that spirit of spiritual mourning somewhere resides in your heart? Have you turned to Christ like that with a sense, a recognition of your sin and with a sense of sorrow over your sin? As I said last time, your repentance doesn't have to be perfect. There doesn't have to be a perfection in all of these aspects, but it needs to be genuine, it needs to be sincere, there needs to be an element that says, "I'm not withholding anything from Christ," is what I mean by that. So there is this knowledge of sin, there is this sorrow of sin, thirdly, there is a turning from sin. A turning from sin. There is a redirection of the human will in repentance that says, "Once I followed this course, now I am choosing against that, I am turning to something else." It's an utter revolution in the inner man that can happen only as a gift, as a prompting from the Holy Spirit himself.

Look at Acts 26. We'll look at Paul's words again, and actually our Lord's words. Acts 26. Paul is giving his testimony as he is facing trial and he explains what the Lord did to him, just as the ladies did in baptism earlier, and in Acts 26:12 he said, "as I was journeying to

Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests," he was going to imprison Christians, "at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'" Paul realized he had been arrested, as it were, by a greater one than he. He didn't know him. He said, "'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you.'" So Jesus is giving Paul his commission. He says, "I am now laying hold of you, I am sovereignly making you My own," which is what the Lord does in every true conversion, he sovereignly makes a man, woman, boy or girl his own, and then he tells Paul what he is to go out and preach, and what is the message that the Lord told Paul to preach as Paul himself reported it to the king before whom he stood? "To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." Do you see the promise yet again? Forgiveness, an inheritance given to those who repent and believe. The gospel is a warning, it's also a wonderful guarantee of what will come for those who turn to Christ in this way.

So in verse 19, Paul says, "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles," what a preacher he was. What did he say to them? "That," here's the content of his message, the summary statement of it all. What should they do in response to the gospel? "They should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance." Jesus said, "Repent." Paul said, "Repent." Peter said, "Repent." You know, Scripture would only have to say it one time for it to be true, between the passages we saw this week and the ones that we're looking at this week, we're seeing a dozen passages, give or take, all making this same emphasis. The clarity and convicting power of that is enormous. Christ told men to turn from darkness to him. Paul said turn from darkness to Christ.

So knowledge of sin, sorrow over sin, turning from sin. Have you turned to Christ like that, my friends? Let me clarify something here because we all, and especially if you're new to this kind of teaching, as clear as Scripture is, it's easy for our self-righteous nature to distort what is being said. When Scripture calls you to repent, repentance is not this, it's not what I'm about say. Repentance is not saying, "I will fix myself, then, and I am going to try harder now going forward. I resolve in my own strength to be a new man." No, true repentance with what we're describing here is the man saying within the depths of his heart, "I cannot fix myself. I am a slave to my sin. I need deliverance from someone outside me and greater than me because I cannot fix myself." Stated differently, repentance, and, oh, it's so easy for this to be misunderstood, when we call you to repent, when the Bible calls you to repent, it is not calling you to an effort at self-improvement so then then you can come to Christ. After you've cleaned things up a bit, then you can

come to Christ. That's not repentance, that's just a further spiral down into self-effort. No. No, the whole idea of repentance, the whole presupposition in this knowledge and sorrow and the volitional turning from sin is that you are ruined, that you cannot improve yourself, that you are dead in trespasses and sins and a dead man can't do anything.

So in repentance, you are crying out in an abandonment of self, calling to Christ and confessing your spiritual ruin and asking him to have mercy on you. You are looking away from self in repentance toward Christ and that brings us to our fourth and final point here this morning: commitment to Christ. Commitment to Christ, and here I'm admittedly somewhat blending the concept of repentance and faith but the two are inseparable as we said last week. True repentance involves true faith in Christ and vice versa, and so I think it's appropriate to say these things together and not just for the sake of precision, theological precision, leaving something out of a message like that that is especially designed to the 50 of you who I am concerned are on a road to destruction.

Commitment to Christ. What did Paul say about commitment to Christ? I'm not going to have you turn there but what Paul says is that there is a new allegiance to Christ that marks every true Christian. There's something new, an attachment, a devotion, a submission to Christ. Repentance turns away from sin to Christ in submission so that the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:22 could say it this way. 1 Corinthians 16:22 if you're taking notes, "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed." You either love the Lord or you're going to be damned. So there is this love for Christ that true repentance is wrapped around and you turn to him knowing he is the only Savior and depending upon him alone for your forgiveness. If someone does not love Christ, Paul says, curses be upon him.

Now Paul gives this spirit from the positive side as well. Look at Philippians 3, a passage we looked at just a few months ago. Philippians 3. You see the rejection of self, the rejection of sin and an embracing of Christ in what Paul says here. Philippians 3:7. After having talked about all of the things that would contribute to a spirit of self-righteousness in himself in verses 3 through 6, Paul gathers it all up in verse 7 and says this, "whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." Paul says, "I have rejected everything about my self-righteous past. I consider it all to be rubbish. It is all dung. That's what I think about my former life," Paul says. "I reject it all. I've turned from it all and in its place, oh, I have turned to the blessedness of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him I find my all. Knowing Him is a surpassing thing in my life and I rely not on a righteousness of my own but a righteousness that comes from Christ that God has given to me that I received by faith. I am not trusting in my own righteousness," Paul says, "I am trusting in a righteousness external to me. I'm trusting in the righteousness of Christ and that's what God has given to me and that's better than everything in the world to me."

You see, in repentance the old man dies gladly and the new man loves Christ without limit.

Well, time has gotten away from us here. Where does all of that leave us as we walk out today? Now let me bring in the other 200 of you, my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Fifth point: repentance and you. Repentance and you. I've long said that in a message on repentance, the preacher needs to take great care on where he leaves his audience at the end. Repentance is very convicting to hear because it tells us there is nothing righteous in ourselves. It reminds us of the realities of coming judgment and hell and all of the threats of that and those are heavy themes, for sure, but that's reality, but when we preach repentance, we are ultimately pointing you to Christ. Remember that true repentance turns from self to Christ. It is a blessed thing to die, so to speak. It's a blessed thing for that old man to die, the old you to die because you get something great in return, you get the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And in Christ we have all of the treasures of wisdom, all of the treasures of forgiveness, all of the treasures of hope, all of the certainty of the forgiveness of sin, all of the certainty of his sure promises that nothing will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. You see, repentance is ultimately a glorious thing because in the end it points us to him, and if you have repented, you have a wonderful thing in Christ.

Let me give you three quick bullet points here as we close. First of all, to all of you, the 50 and the 200, the 99 and the 1, let me just encourage you. Scripture says examine yourselves to see if you're in the faith. Test yourselves. It's incumbent upon each one of us in light of these things to look at our lives and say, "Are these things about Christ true of me?" Stated differently, is your repentance real, genuine and earnest, to use some of the words that we saw from Scripture? Is your repentance earnest or is it simply a game, especially for you young people? Oh, you don't know how much sleep I lose over some of you, to grow up in the church and to just play the game and not take any of it seriously and to just be content to kind of stand outside of the gospel gossiping with your friends, doing worldly things with your friend and not taking these things too earnestly. I'm here to tell you that's a bad way to live, and as a young person it's a great time for you to repent and to turn to Christ in the way that we're talking about right here, right now. These things are earnest. These things matter. These things are true. These things can't be put aside and if you condition yourself to deal with them in a trivial dismissive way, you are setting a very bad course for your life. And so I plead with you, my loved ones, I plead with you, you're a young person but you can turn to Christ, you can be earnest about these things. Timothy knew these things from childhood, so can you.

So examine yourselves. Secondly, to those of us who are Christians, bringing myself under the word of God here as well, just to remind you that repentance is a way of life. It's not a one time event. There may be a clear moment of conversion for some, for others it's not that way, but genuine repentance leads into a lifestyle of repentance where sin is not tolerated. My Christian friends, if sin needs to be turned from by sinners, how much more those of us that have been born again that belong to him, that love his holiness? You see, this calls on us too. Charles Spurgeon said this, he said, "A Christian must never quit repenting for I fear that he never quits sinning."

Finally, to end this on the pinnacle, my Christian friends, if you're repentant, rejoice. Rejoice because repentance opens the door to grace. As God leads you and grants you repentance and you exercise that repentant faith, you have entered into a realm of grace that is glorious where all of your sins of the past, God says, "I separate you from them." He says, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. Your guilty conscience can yield and be satisfied and silenced by the blood of Christ because in the blood of Christ all of your guilt has been paid for in full. It's finished. So you can rejoice.

In 1 Timothy 1:12, Paul said this, you don't need to turn there, Paul said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."

My friends, my Christian friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, that's where we walk out today. Yes, we are confessing our utter bankruptcy before God and yet in Christ we are lost in wonder, love and praise that he has shown a mercy on us, forgiven us, washed us, made us clean, forgiven all of our transgressions, and we go out with a fresh conscience, with a fresh sense of joy of what our gracious Lord has done for us. You other 50, I ask you, have you turned to Christ like this? I get one last chance to say it to you. Have you turned to Christ like this?

Paul ended that section and said, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."

Let's pray.

Father, may Your Holy Spirit give wings to Your word, apply them deeply in each of our hearts. Father, for the rhetorical 50, I ask You to grant them repentance and to draw them to saving faith in Christ. I plead with You, Father, to do that. For those of us that are in Christ, Father, we do honor You, we offer You our praise, our thanksgiving. We admit that our salvation is entirely a gift from You and nothing that we did to earn, and we look forward to the fulfillment and the culmination of all of Your promises to Your people when we will one day gather around the throne and sing praises to our most worthy Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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