

God commands all people everywhere to repent

A sermon preached at Poplar Baptist Church on
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In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17.30 – 31)

Introduction

Israel Folau is a professional rugby union player in Australia. He is reckoned by many to be the finest rugby player of that country. Two weeks ago he posted on a social media outlet on the internet the following words, “WARNING: Drunks, Homosexuals, Adulterers, Liars, Thieves, Atheists, Idolaters, HELL AWAITS YOU. Repent! ONLY JESUS SAVES.” He continued in the same post, “Those who are living in sin will end up in hell unless you repent. Jesus Christ loves you and is giving you time to turn away from your sin and come to him.” For saying these things publicly he has been widely denounced as being “homophobic”, has been relieved of all playing duties, and has been put on notice that his contract with the Australian rugby union is to be terminated, subject to a hearing which is to take place probably next week.

Another rugby union player, Billy Vinupola, who plays for England, “liked” Israel Folau’s post, and posted on the same social media platform,

So this morning I got 3 phone calls from people telling me to ‘unlike’ the @izzyfolau post. This is my position on it...What he’s saying isn’t that he doesn’t like or love those people. He’s saying how we live our lives needs to be closer to how God intended them to be. Man was made for woman to pro create that was the goal no?

For that post Vinupola has also been called “homophobic” and has been reprimanded by his club and the English Rugby Union. He was booed as he came on to the pitch to play at Bristol recently.

These men are being criticised for saying, in their own words, what our text today says, that God is commanding all people everywhere to repent of their sins. The apostle Paul says in Acts chapter 17 verses 30 and 31,

[God] commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.

Let me say a bit about the context of these words.

Paul was in Athens, in Greece, nearly 2,000 years ago. Athens was the cultural capital of the ancient world. We read in verse 16 that Paul was greatly distressed because of all the idols that he saw, even in this centre of great learning. His response was to start reasoning with the people, first with Jews and then with others. This caused quite a stir. The philosophers wondered if Paul was bringing in some new religion, because he was talking about Jesus and the resurrection. They brought him to the Areopagus, which was a place where they discussed various ideas. They asked him what he was teaching. He said that he had seen a statue to the “unknown God”, and told them about the God that they did not know. He explained that God is the God who made everything, and that he is the Lord of heaven and earth. He does not live in temples built by human hands. He does not need anything, but rather is the one who gives all men life and breath and everything else. He made all men from one man. He determined when and where people should live. He did this so that men should seek him and perhaps reach out to him and find him.

So, the apostle said in conclusion, “We should not think that that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by human design and skill”. God, in other words, is not an idol. He is the living God, the creator of all things, and should be worshipped as such. This leads us to the verses we are thinking about today.

As we think about these verses, we can do so under three headings:

1. God’s call to all to repent.
2. Why we must repent: because there is a judgement day coming

3. The proof of the coming judgement: Jesus has been raised from the dead.

1. God's call to all to repent

The apostle says, as recorded in verse 30, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent." The word that is translated "repent" means literally "to change your mind." The person who repents changes his whole outlook on God and on life, leading to a profound change in the way he lives. He stops approving of what is wrong, turns from it, and starts to do what is right.

So the apostle here is saying that God is telling everybody, everywhere, to turn from sin. The sin that the apostle is particularly talking about in this context is the sin of idolatry.

What is idolatry? Idolatry is the worship of created things, rather than of the uncreated God. The best definition I know of is in Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 1 verse 25, where he says, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is for ever praised. Amen"

In the ancient world the idols were the Greek and Roman gods, who were the sort of "superheroes" of the ancient world: Zeus, Hermes, Athene, and others. These gods have long been discredited. I do not know of anyone who believes in them today. But there are plenty of modern idols who have taken their place. There are religious gods, like Mary, the so-called "saints", the Buddha, or the Hindu gods. Even Jesus is often worshipped as an idol, when he is portrayed on a crucifix, and people bow down to or kiss that crucifix. Islam claims to be very strongly opposed to idolatry, and yet the Kaaba, which is at the centre of Islamic worship, is effectively an idol, and Mohammed is so fiercely defended by his followers that it is arguable that he has become an idol in the minds of many of them.

In the secular West we might well say that we do not believe in religious idols. Many in the West claim to be completely non-religious, and say that idols are nothing. But, whilst we might say this sort of thing, without our knowing, we find ourselves worshipping secular, non-religious idols. Man is, by his very nature, a religious being. If he does not worship the God of the Bible, he will inevitably worship something else. This might be sports stars, celebrities, actors, money, our homes, our job, educational achievement, or pleasure. Many people are addicted to

alcohol, drugs, sex or music. The things to which they are addicted have become their idols.

Idolatry is a sin which is highly offensive sin to God. God rightly demands that we should worship him, the true God, and him alone, and that we should abandon the worship of false gods.

It is not only idolatry that we should repent of. We should repent of all sin.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verses 9 and 10 the apostle Paul says,

Do you not now that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul says in this verse that those who practice sin, and continue to do so without repenting, will not inherit the kingdom of God. Let me explain the sins that the apostle mentions here:

Sexual immorality. This is having sex with someone to whom you are not married. Even if you are engaged to be married, or in a long term relationship, any sexual encounter, or fantasising about such an encounter, is sinful in God's sight.

Idolatry. This I have already explained as worshipping false gods.

Adultery. This is where two people have sex, but at least one party is married to someone else. This is a particularly bad form of sexual immorality, as it involves a breach of trust.

Homosexuality. This is where two people of the same biological gender have a sexual relationship, whether two men or two women, or when a man or woman entertains lust for someone of the same gender.

Stealing. This is taking property that does not belong to you without the permission of the owner.

Greed. This is wanting more and more things, and not being content with what you have.

Drunkenness This is drinking alcohol to excess. Drinking alcohol is not in itself sinful, but drinking to the point where your behaviour and speech are adversely affected is.

Slander. This is speaking untruths to or about others.

Swindling. This is obtaining money or goods by deception.

The apostle warns that those who practise these sins and do not repent will not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, they will go to hell.

Other Scriptures similarly warn us that that the continued practice of sin without repentance leads to hell. In Galatians chapter 5 verses 19 to 21, the apostle Paul writes,

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Similarly, in Ephesians chapter 5 verses 5 and 6, he writes,

For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no-one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

In the book of Revelation chapter 21 verse 8 we read, “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practise magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.”

Notice, our principal text says that “God calls all people everywhere to repent.” This is a universal call to every person in the whole world, in all places. No-one is exempt from the summons.

Some people imagine that, because they are atheists, God will “respect” their non-religion and treat them differently. That is not the case at all. Whether or not you say that you believe in God, you are still subject to this royal summons to repent of your sin.

Others imagine that people of other religions apart from Christianity will be exempted from this call to repent. But no! The call goes out to all, whatever their religion.

Others, who talk a lot about “predestination” (according to their understanding of the term) say that those who have not been chosen by God cannot be told to repent of their sins, because God would not tell people to do something that they are unable to do. But the Paul does not say here, “God calls all those who have been chosen by God to

repent". No. All people everywhere are called to repent. If they refuse to do so, they will be held responsible.

So here is the first point: God calls all to repent of their sins.

2. Why we must repent: because there is a judgement day coming

Let us hear our text again: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

The reason why we must all repent is because all of us will be judged. Notice the following things from this part of the verse.

First of all, God has set a day when the world is going to be judged. That day has been determined by God. Nothing will stop it from happening. It is completely certain. No-one knows when it will be. Even Jesus, when he was on earth, did not know when he would be coming again. But that day of judgement is definitely coming.

Secondly, the judgement will be a universal judgement. The whole world will be judged. No-one will be exempt. Those who are alive when Jesus comes again to judge the world will be given immortal bodies and will be summoned before his throne. Those who have died already will be raised up from the dead and will appear before the judgement seat. Those who profess to be Christians will appear before the judgement seat of Christ, as will those who make no profession to be Christians. Those who practise other religions will be there, as will atheists and agnostics. The rich and famous will be there, as will the "nobodies" of this world. All religious leaders will be there, together with all prophets, including Mohammed, and all will be judged. The only person who will not be judged will be Jesus, because he will be the judge.

Thirdly, the judgement will be carried out with justice. All the facts will be laid bare. All the things we have ever done, said and thought will be revealed. Mitigating circumstances will be properly taken into account. Each person will be dealt with completely fairly.

Fourthly, the judgement will be by the man whom God has appointed. Who is this person? Jesus. Jesus himself made that abundantly clear when he was on earth, and the consistent teaching of the whole of

Scripture is that it is Jesus, the eternal Son of God who became man, who will judge the world. This of course shows that, as well as being human, Jesus is divine just as much as God the Father is, because only God is qualified to judge.

So there is our second point: the whole world will be judged by Jesus Christ.

3. The proof of the coming judgement: Jesus has been raised from the dead

Let us hear our text again: “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead.”

People say, “How do we know it is true? How do we know that the world will be judged?” The answer is that we know that the world will be judged because God raised his Son Jesus from the dead.

The facts of the resurrection are plain for all to see.

First of all, it is clear that it was Jesus who was on the cross. Some Moslems believe that Jesus taken back up to heaven and that someone else died in his place on the cross. But the death of Jesus was a public execution. A large part of the population of Jerusalem went out to see him die. Jesus was a well known figure. If someone else had been put on the cross it would have been spotted, and there would have been an outcry.

Secondly, there is no doubt that he did die. To make sure that he was dead, a soldier thrust a spear into his side, and out came “blood and water” in other words, clotted blood. He was dead. Many witnesses saw this.

Thirdly, he was buried. He was placed in a tomb, and a stone was rolled over the entrance. A guard was placed over the tomb.

Fourthly, three days later, the tomb was empty. There was an earthquake and the stone rolled away. The guards fled. What was revealed by the stone being rolled away was that the tomb was empty. Jesus’s body had been raised already. No-one has been able to come up with a satisfactory explanation of what happened to Jesus’s body, apart from that he was raised from the dead.

Fifthly, there were multiple appearances of Jesus to various people. He appeared to Mary, then to Peter, and then to two disciples walking down the road to Emmaus, then to the disciples, minus Thomas, then a week later to all the disciples including Thomas, then on another occasion to the disciples when they were fishing, then to over 500 people. Jesus spoke with his disciples, and ate with them. They touched him. They did not see some sort of vision or a ghost. He was physically present with them.

Sixthly, after forty days, Jesus went back up to heaven, in front of the eyes of his disciples, and the angel told them that he would come back the way that he had gone.

Seventhly, from heaven, Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on his disciples, transforming them from being overwhelmed with fear to being bold preachers of himself and his resurrection.

Eighthly, millions of people around the world testify to knowing his risen power in their lives, to change them and to enable them to serve God.

All these things stack up to prove beyond any shadow of doubt that Jesus really was raised from the dead. This in turn proves that he is coming, and that we shall all be judged by him.

Conclusion

We have seen three things today:

1. God's call to all to repent.
2. Why we must repent: because there is a judgement day coming
3. The proof of the coming judgement: Jesus has been raised from the dead

Will you hear this call from God to repent? You might say, "I want to, but I am so weak". Here is the good news: the very Jesus who will judge you also died on the Cross in the place of sinners. If you turn from your sin and trust in him, you will be completely forgiven for your sins, and you will receive power to live in a new way. Come to Jesus. Trust in him. Ask him to give you eternal life.

This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=420192057183389>

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