

Repentance

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[0 : 00] You turn with me now for a little time as we meditate together in a portion we have read in the New Testament scriptures. The Gospel of Christ by Luke, chapter 13, and reading again at the beginning of that chapter.

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?

I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Our Savior in this chapter, my friends, takes the opportunity to preach on the necessity of repentance by men and women generally.

And he does so by making reference to a calamity which befell certain Galileans and a natural catastrophe which befell others.

[1 : 23] What caused the displeasure of Pilate so that he wickedly visited these Galileans, we are not told.

Or what occasion the catastrophe at Siloam is not recorded for us. And these details are not really of any great consequence for our purpose.

Our Lord simply uses them in order to illustrate the need of repentance, the universality of sin and the necessity that men and women should repent irrespective of their moral or social condition in life.

Now then, we must remember that repentance is inseparable from the gospel of the grace of God.

It is indeed an integral part of that gospel. And it is foolish in the extreme to separate the gospel from sin and from the need that men should repent.

[2 : 42] It is an insult to the intelligence of men to offer them the gospel without at the same time specifying to them why they need this gospel.

When we speak of salvation and when we refer to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Savior under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved, we have to specify and emphasize what he is saved from and why men need to be saved by him.

In a great many areas of the professing church today, we know that the mention of sin is simply not tolerated.

This is a no-go area so far as many are concerned. We have outgrown, they said, all that and we have left it behind us.

It is an insult to modern man with the staggering progress he has made to even suggest that he is not morally and spiritually complete.

[3 : 57] And so because of this, the gospel itself, it is emptied of its essential content. If man isn't a sinner and doesn't need to be saved, there is no real need for a saving gospel.

And so the gospel is merely socialized. This is the direction in which the gospel is projected when sin is put to one side.

It is proclaimed in terms of men engaged in social activities or as you have it expressed in many parts of the third world, in liberating men from the social and political order that has kept them as underdogs for centuries.

And so in many places we have violent revolution preached in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And this is the direction in which the minds of men are set in order to focus on this so-called gospel.

[5 : 09] And so we have to keep these things in the background as we look at this question from a biblical perspective.

We ask then various questions in connection with this matter of repentance. We begin by asking what is impenetence?

What are we to understand by impenetence? The Bible is full of this doctrine of repentance. The necessity of evidencing repentance.

And so we should be concerned to discover what impenetence is. What it is not to evidence, not to express an attitude and a spirit of repentance.

Well, for one thing, impenetence is surely a blind refusal to consider that there is anything basically or essentially wrong with men.

[6 : 15] And so we find because there is this blind refusal to consider that there is anything wrong, we have men at pains to invent all sorts of reasons to explain away the undeniable reality of evil and of wrongdoing.

Therefore, we find, do we not, that when law and order, when they break down, that politicians and sociologists and educationists are falling over one another to discover the reason for it in a social structure of society.

It must be in a social order, in a social order, in a social order, in a social order, in a lack of amenities, in various other directions, in a lack of proper educational standards.

One is trying to buy with the other to find a reason for the breakdown of law and order. When a young person, when he falls foul, as we know, of the law of the land, the first thing that is called for is a social background report before anything else is done.

Now, I'm not suggesting that such steps as these should not be taken, or that the authorities should not display the utmost of compassion and concern for men and women.

[7 : 42] What I am suggesting is that the prognosis is altogether superficial, and that men are looking in the wrong direction for a prognosis as to what is wrong.

This, in one sense, is impenitent, a blind refusal to consider that there is anything basically wrong with men and with society.

But then, too, impenitent is also a deliberate rejection of the biblical view of man. You see, the Bible gives its own distinct prognosis on this question of sin and evil and man.

It states categorically what sin is and where it stems from. It points out that the problem lies in the very nature of man himself.

It doesn't lie in his environment. It doesn't lie in his surroundings. Although these are contributing factors to a very considerable degree to the problem.

[8 : 55] But the real problem lies initially within the man's own personality. This is the biblical view. This is the biblical teaching.

There is no soundness in man. He was born in sin. He was shaped in iniquity. His whole nature is corrupt. But generally speaking, we know that this view of man is quite unacceptable and immediately rejected by the vast majority of people.

And so impenitence is a deliberate rejection of the biblical view of man. Impenitence also is a viewing of sin as something less than a great moral evil.

And so something that can be dealt with by external methods and can be eventually obliterated from society altogether. It is not outwith the power and the province of man to deal with his problems.

That is what we get from different directions. This is the basic philosophy of every sincere, non-Christian do-gooder in the world of men.

[10 : 12] If one doesn't question the sincerity of those people for a moment, one does question the premises from which they are operating. And you see, my dear friends, if a man's premises are wrong, then whatever he does, by the doing of good, and however energetic he may be in doing that good, he is doomed to failure.

If his premises are not stemming from the right direction, from the right source, and based in the right source, he is doomed to failure.

Impenitence, then, is a viewing of sin as something less than the greatest moral evil. And we, I think, can also say that impenitence is an excusing of ourselves on the imaginative basis that we can do nothing.

Which, of course, is only half a truth. But you see, the devil delights in to deal in half-truths, and he effectively works havoc with men in this way.

Of course, we cannot deliver ourselves from the grip or from the power of sin. But it is a far cry from asserting that, consequently, we have no obligation to turn away from sin.

[11 : 34] Again and again, this is the call of the Word of God. To return from the way we are pursuing, from the natural course that we are following in our lives.

Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O house of Israel? This is your obligation, it is mine. In reference to that which is most dishonouring to our God.

This, then, is what impenitence is, and very much more. But in the second place, we ask another question. And that is, what is, why is repentance called for?

Why is it called for again and again throughout the Holy Scriptures? Why does the Bible insist that men and women should repent?

Why did Jesus preach its necessity? Why has God commanded his church to go into all the world and preach that repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

[12 : 43] Well, our answer to this question will depend on the view we adopt with regard to God and to man. Or rather, whether we accept the biblical view on this whole question of sin in the world.

We have no hesitation asserting that repentance is imperative, for one thing, because man is in rebellion against God.

And he is in rebellion against God because he chose to be in rebellion against God. This was never intended to be in the first instance.

At his creation, he was so constituted as to conform to the divine norm for living. But with the freedom to reject and to repudiate that norm.

And this, in fact, is what happened. For as our Catechism says, man being left to the freedom of his own will fell from the estate wherein he was created by sinning against God.

[13 : 49] And so, sin is any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God. God wrote his law on the heart of man at creation and created him so that it would be a sheer delight for him to conform to the norm that he had set before him.

But, you see, man thought that he could improve on what God had done. And so he went diametrically against the divine norm that was set before him.

And in God's view, this constituted rebellion of the most grievous nature. And Adam, of course, being a representative man, all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression.

Repentance is imperative because man is in rebellion against God. And remember, too, that repentance is imperative because man has earned the divine anathema because of his rebellion.

Because what he did was utterly obnoxious to God, the God of heaven. You see, God rightly claimed over lordship of the man whom he had formed in his own image.

[15 : 16] And he rightly and properly commanded him, this do and live. This was the relation in which the creature would stand to the creator in all time.

And this was the relation in which the supreme happiness of the creature would be expressed. We must always bear this in mind, my friends.

That God was concerned with the totality of the happiness of the creature. And he alone knew how that happiness could find full and total expression in the world.

And when his plan was rejected, the inevitable happened. Man came under the anathema of God. I say inevitable because God could not have reacted otherwise than he did.

In dismissing man from his presence and in alienating him altogether from his communion. In bringing him, in other words, under his wrath and under his curse.

[16 : 26] And so because of this, penitence is inevitable because man has earned the divine anathema. But then repentance is also imperative because man is lost in relation to himself.

He doesn't know where he is going. He lives in a hostile world. And he is subject to all the miseries of that world. Miseries which he brought upon himself.

He doesn't know how he is properly acting. Or what will meet him around the next corner. And certainly has no thought, for the most part, of what will take place in the hereafter.

You see, he has rejected God. And he has rejected a future life. And he has rejected any meaningful answer to life and to the problems of life.

He doesn't know where to find an answer to what is perplexing him and what is besetting him. In recent days, I heard of a young man whose young wife was dying of cancer.

[17 : 36] They had no God within the realm of their vision. They had nothing so far as eternity was concerned. But this young man simply refused to believe that she would die.

He refused to accept even a possibility that she would die. And when she did eventually die, he went completely to pieces.

You see, there was nothing within the realm of his life upon which he could grasp a hold. His life was empty in relation to God and in relation to eternity.

What a pathetic situation. And remember, that young man was not exceptional. Man is utterly lost in relation to himself and the environment in which he is living.

The world through which he is traveling. But he will not return. He will not repent. He will not have this man to reign over him. That is generally speaking the attitude of fallen man.

[18 : 46] But then too, repentance is imperative because man is destined to perish forever. Unless he repents.

Unless he returns. And this clearly is what Jesus is here impressing upon his ears. Nay, but except you repent, you shall all likewise perish.

It is not just that as a result of sin that man is under the wrath and curse of God and so made liable to all the miseries of his life and to death itself.

But he is also made liable to the pains of hell forever. Remember, sin has an eternal dimension. And it is with that dimension that we must concern ourselves.

It is simply, it simply cannot be confined to the realm of time and the realm of space. Its reality and its consequences, unless it is repented of, must be expressed in a place concerning which the word of God has said that their worm dieth not, nor is the fire quenched.

[20 : 03] These are solemn and these are awesome words. These are at least some of the reasons why repentance is imperative.

But we proceed to ask another question. And it is this, what is repentance? What are we to understand by repentance?

I think it will carry us and answers well that question as it does so many other questions for us. If we will just go to the trouble of examining it. Repentance unto life, it says, is a saving grace.

Whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does with grief and hatred of his sin turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.

That question gives us the true secret of what gospel repentance is. It says that, for one thing, that it is an acute sense of one's sinfulness.

[21 : 13] An acute sense that a man is a sinner. Whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin. Now, when a man is brought to this point, when a man is so convicted by the Spirit of God that he realizes that he is a sinner, that man is isolated from his fellow men.

This separates him from his fellows. He simply sees himself and recognizes what he is before God. He is no longer satisfied to stand back and view sin from a distance and perhaps even with a feeling of smugness, say to himself, I'm not as bad after all as some other people are.

When a man comes face to face with this reality of seeing himself as a sinner before God, he will no longer be smug.

My friend, the essence of conviction and therefore of repentance unto life is that you, in your own estimation, you are the worst person living.

This is what a true sense of sin implies and supports it. Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, an acute sense that he is a sinner.

[22 : 50] But repentance also, there is something else in it, and that is an apprehension of the mercy of God. It is inseparable from an apprehension of the mercy of God.

True conviction has within itself an apprehension of God's mercy in Christ, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.

Ah, yes. Ah, yes. The picture which gospel conviction presents to man is dark, as it relates to himself as a sinner.

All he can do is look down. He can no longer look up with confidence. He can as much as lift his eyes to heaven.

All he can do is smite upon his breast. But in that season, in that season of twilight and darkness, when conviction grips him, he has an apprehension, even in that moment, of the mercy of God.

[23 : 58] And so, because he has that apprehension, he cries, God, be merciful to me. Men and brethren, what must I do to be saved?

The Spirit of God doesn't bring despair when he brings conviction. He also brings an apprehension of mercy, and where mercy is to be found, this is included in gospel repentance.

But in repentance also, in gospel repentance, we have a receding from the way of iniquity, a withdrawing, if you like, from the path of sin.

Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, turns from it to God. You see, there is a retracing of the sinner's footsteps from the way he had previously been going.

There is a turning back from the province of the far-off country. He has gone far enough in that direction. He now is retracing his footsteps.

[25 : 06] I will arise and go to my father. I will return. There is a turning round and a turning about and a stepping out of the broad way that would lead to total disaster.

This enters into the very essence of the word repent. That is, there is a rethinking on his part. There is a reshaping of his life.

There is a reorganizing of the whole structure of the way in which he is living. And there is a return unto God.

That is how scripture represents it again and again. A receding, a turning back. And a turning back supposes and implies a turning to the offer that the gospel sets before him.

And in gospel repentance, there is also in that question, as we saw, an exercising of a life of new obedience, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, turns from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.

[26 : 31] Now it is precisely here that a man has to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. It is by grace that he is saved and by grace alone.

It is the grace of God that is operated in his life. Repentance unto life, as you said, is a saving grace. But then, the man is commanded to work out your own salvation with fear and with trembling.

And so, as the spirit of God operates and continues to operate, so he, by the power of that spirit, will continue to respond and to do precisely what is commanded of him in the word of God.

His obligation will at length be recognized and he will seek to fulfill it. Now, my dear friend, allow me to ask you where you yourself stand in relation to this.

We have to beware against being impersonal in these matters. We ought to be judiciously and scripturally personal when it comes to such an awesome theme as this and how we yourselves stand in relation to such a matter.

[27 : 57] And so, you'll permit me to ask you, are you willing to accept the designation of sinner? Are you ready?

Are you prepared? Are you willing to accept this designation? I ask you that because so many are unwilling to accept such a designation.

They are exceedingly angry. They will be exceedingly angry if you would suggest to them that they were sinners. And so, I ask you, are you willing to accept this designation that you are a sinner without qualification at all?

This doesn't in any way justify you or make you any more acceptable to God, but it is a great step forward from demurring resentfully about the emphasis which scripture places on man's sin as being the root cause of all the problems of the world.

Are you as a prepared to acquiesce in the biblical definition of the man who has rebelled against God as having no soundness in him, but is full of wounds and bruises and putrifying sores?

[29 : 17] Are you prepared to accept that definition of yourself as a sinner? And are you prepared to say, that's me, that describes me perfectly by nature, by practice, I am a sinner.

This, my friend, is a step, I say, in the right direction, but only a step. Are you then willing to accept the designation of sinner?

But then I ask you also, are you prepared to seek deliverance from your sin? I have known people in a culture in which I was reared who would sit for hours under the most eloquent sermons on the reality and the effect and the consequences of sin and who would come back for more and who reveled in it and who delighted, it would seem, to listen to such sermonizing.

But yet men who never gave the smallest evidence in their lives that it constituted a personal problem to themselves so that they were prepared to do anything about it.

So far as anyone could see, they lived in sin, they loved sin, and all without exception with sin, they died in sin without showing, evidencing, any repentance.

[31 : 01] my friend, it is good to accept the designation of sinner, to accept the biblical view of sin, but if you proceed no further, you are simply adding to your own condemnation on the day of judgment.

You see, your obligation is as clear as the sun is in heaven and your obligation is to turn that you may live. I say you do not save yourself from sin, but you are obligated to turn unto God with full repentance and endeavor after new obedience.

Are you prepared to take this other step? Not only accept the designation of sinner, but are you prepared to seek deliverance from sin?

and then are you ready to embrace God's remedy for you as a sinner?

For your deliverance and for your salvation? In other words, are you prepared by the grace of God to receive and to rest upon Jesus Christ alone as he is offered to you in the gospel?

[32 : 22] Remember, God hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin. Why? So that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

He laid on him the iniquity of us all so that the iniquity with which we are overwhelmed would not convey us to eternal perdition.

What must I do to be saved? said the Philippian jailer. Is this your query, my friend? Is this your burden? Is this your concern this evening before God?

Is this what is perplexing and bewildering you? What you must do to be saved? But I can only give you a scripturally biblical answer to that question.

And it is the only answer that will avail for you or for anybody else. and you know it don't you? You know what I'm going to say? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

[33 : 28] There is no other way out of it. There is no other deliverance but God provided deliverance. The son of his love.

He made him to be sin for us who knew no sin for that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And so the gospel in all its comprehensiveness and in all its fullness it comes to you.

Your sinnership is asserted again and again. But the deliverance from this condition is gloriously and clearly set before you in the word of the truth of the gospel.

And remember my friend except you repent you will perish. You will perish. That word will come before you again and again I trust in the days that lie ahead.

But if you continue to resist and if you continue to rebel and if you fail to repent and turn unto God in Jesus Christ you will perish.

[34 : 39] Make no question or no question your mind on this matter. It was Jesus himself who said except you repent you will perish and there will be no remedy.

And that word will meet you at length at the judgment seat of Christ. Nay I say unto you except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.

But why will ye die says God? Turn ye turn ye why will ye die? O house of Ishmael. This is the final word I leave with you.

God saying why will ye die? Why should you die? Because there is provision made and the provision is adequate. It is full. It meets with your need whatever that need may be.

It is offered to you without money and without price. You are called to avail yourself of the offer. O everyone that thirst come ye to the waters.

[35 : 45] He that hath no money come ye buy and eat. Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. I will give you salvation.

I will give you eternal life. Nay except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. Amen.

May God add his blessing to our meditation together. Shall we pray? O gracious God we bow down before thee marvelling that thou art still cultivating us in this way as we were as we have been reading together digging around us and showing energy and concern toward us so that we might bear fruit that we might evidence the fruit of repentance and godliness in our lives that we might show forth that we are concerned to know that salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Lord as thou hast been cultivating us anew this evening in our meditation together in thy truth we pray that the spirit may continue that work so that it may produce repentance faith and new obedience in all of us without exception come in a day of thy power and minister thy spirit oh god in our midst that we may see thy kingdom coming and increasing throughout our midst and in every part of our city and of our land continue with us now as we continue before thee as we give praise in conclusion and continue with thy people as they worship thee oh god after this service here as in heaven cleanse us from sin in Jesus name amen amen