

## REPENTANCE

Those of you who are older may remember an old television program back in the 70s called 'The Wide World of Sports.' It started with the intro showing the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. To show the agony of defeat, a clip of a ski jumper suffering a terrible fall was always shown. The name of the man in that video was Vinko Bogataj. He was competing in an event in Germany in 1970. As he was heading down the hill for his third jump of the day he realized that something was wrong. The snow had become heavy ice and midway down the hill he realized that he was going too fast. If he had completed the jump he would have travelled beyond the safe sloping landing area and hit the flat ground beyond it, which could have been fatal. Seeing that he was in danger he bailed out, tumbling and flipping wildly, and crashing through a light retaining fence near a crowd of spectators before coming to a halt. He suffered a mild concussion and a broken ankle.

Like this skier, changing your course in life sometimes can be a very dramatic and often painful thing to do. However, it is better than facing a fatal landing at the end.

Today we are continuing in our series entitled Authentic Faith. Let me ask you this morning, what comes to your mind when you hear that phrase? What does it mean to be an authentic Christian?

Last week we started with the fact that being an authentic believer means that Jesus first must be lord of your life. We need to be willing to lay down our lives to Him in Salvation, Sanctification, and in Service. Today I want to talk about another basic tenant of the faith. Repentance.

Eze 33:10-11 Son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'This is what you are saying: Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?' ' 11 Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'

For most people, repentance is an ugly word, considered out of date. You do not really hear a lot of pastors preaching today on the topic of repentance.

Joseph Parker was a pastor in England in the 1800s. He once said, "The man whose little sermon is 'repent' sets himself against his age, and will for the time being be battered mercilessly by the age whose moral tone he challenges. There is but one end for such a man -- 'off with his head!' You had better not try to preach repentance until you have pledged your head to heaven."

People do not drift toward holiness & righteousness, they must aim for it. It must be intentional.

When I was in elementary school I had a problem with saying my S and R sounds so I had to take speech classes. I heard the story of a boy who had trouble pronouncing the letter "R" so his teacher gave him a sentence to practice at home: "Robert gave Richard a rap in the rib for roasting the rabbit so rare." Some days later the teacher asked him to say the sentence for her. Jimmy rattled it off, but had changed the words somewhat. He said, "Bob gave Don a poke in the side for not cooking the bunny enough." In changing the words he had avoided the letter "R".

There are a lot of people today who go to great lengths to avoid the "R" word – the word *repentance*. They will do anything to try to change what God's word says about it.

As we look at what it means to have Authentic Faith, we must understand that repentance is part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We see that repentance was central to Jesus' teaching. The first words of Jesus as He began his ministry were about repentance;

Mat 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

Jesus last word in Revelation to the church in Laodicea are;

Rev 3:19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

So what does the bible teach us about it? Let me give you three points;

### 1. The Essence

In the scripture we read from Ezekiel, the people were saying "Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?" These people were part of the nation of Israel. They were God's children, yet they were suffering because of their own actions.

What is repentance? The New Testament word for repent is the Greek word *metaneo* which literally means, 'to think differently' or to 'reconsider.' It means that you begin to see your sin in a different light, you change your mind, and when you change your mind you change your direction. Many people think that repentance just means trying not to sin, but it is much more than that. It is not just turning away from the fruits of sin, but also the roots of sin.

From the scripture that we read this morning, Ezekiel continues;

Eze 33:12-16 Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, 'The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness.' 13 If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. 14 And if I say to the wicked man, 'You will surely die,' but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right -- 15 if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. 16 None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live.

What God is saying here is that faith is not a 'one and done' sort of thing. It is not just a mental assent of truth or loyalty to a religious affiliation. It is a personal relationship. Being married is a whole lot more than getting married. If you think you can walk down the aisle and say I do and then that is it, you are going to have problems. It is not like the guy who told his wife "I told you that I loved you when we got married, and if anything changes I will let you know."

God is also NOT saying here that that faith is based on works. As long as you do the right things that God will love you and then you can earn your way into heaven. Nothing that we do can make God love us any more than He already does and nothing we do will ever make God love us any less.

What he is saying is that authentic faith is a relationship that shows itself in action. Like I said last week, to the person who thinks that just because they were born into a Christian home or because their dad is an elder or because they said a prayer of salvation at camp when they were 10 means that they can do what they want with their life, God says be careful.

If we trust in our own righteousness and do evil, none of the righteous things we have done will be remembered.

Luke 3:7-8 John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father...'

John the Baptist challenged them to 'produce fruit in keeping with repentance.' In other words, let your life show who you really belong to. He went on to say that if a tree does not produce good fruit it will be cut down and thrown into the fire. You can tell what kind of tree it is by the fruit that it bears. His message was centered around the need for repentance.

The essence of repentance is a change of mind, a change of attitude, and a change of heart. It is the admission that you are a sinner. It is agreeing with God that you have done what is wrong and seeking to change that. A change of mind leading to a change of action.

There was a cartoon in which little George Washington is standing with an axe in his hand. Before him lying on the ground is the famous cherry tree. He has already made his smug admission that he did it -- after all, he "cannot tell a lie." But his father is standing there exasperated saying, "All right, so you admit it! You always admit it! The question is, when are you going to stop doing it?"

If there is no repentance, there can be no pardon. Some years ago a murderer was sentenced to death. The murderer's brother, to whom the State was deeply indebted for former services, besought the governor of the State for his brother's pardon. The pardon was granted, and the man visited his brother with the pardon in his pocket. "What would you do," he said to him, "if you received a pardon?" "The first thing I would do," he answered, "is to track down the judge who sentenced me, and murder him; and the next thing I would do is to track down the chief witness, and murder him." The brother rose, and left the prison with the pardon in his pocket. Because of what this man had done, the death penalty was waiting on him. The opportunity was granted to him, but it called for repentance. Since there could be no repentance, there also could be no pardon.

## 2. The Essentials

God created us to be in relationship with Him. When Adam and Eve sinned, that relationship was broken and all creation was affected. There was a barrier that we put up. Instead of seeking out God, Adam and Eve began to hide from God. Jesus came to undo the works of the devil. By dying for our sins he removed the barrier that existed between God and His creation.

Col 2:13-15 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

In Jesus we have been forgiven. We have been given a new life. We have been given authority and power over hell. The problem is that, even though we have been given this freedom, we often do not walk in it. Instead of living in the freedom we have been given we allow ourselves to be enslaved by old habits and thought patterns. Paul tells us in Romans;

Rom 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.

So how do we do that? How do we from old habits and patterns of behaviour that enslave us? How do we transform our thinking? The answer is repentance. Again, repentance is primarily a change in thinking leading to a change in behaviour.

Many of you have probably heard of Neil Anderson. He has written books like the 'The Bondage Breaker' and 'Victory Over the Darkness'. He leads a ministry called Freedom in Christ. I had the opportunity to hear him speak in March, the week before the shutdown happened. He about the 7 Steps to Freedom;

Freedom from the Occult – breaking ties to involvement in false religions

Freedom from Deception – breaking ties to lies and false thinking

Freedom from Bitterness – breaking ties to past hurts through forgiveness

Freedom from Rebellion – breaking ties to rebellious thoughts and actions

Freedom from Pride – breaking ties to arrogance and pride

Freedom from Bondage – breaking ties to bad habits and sexual sins

Freedom from Curses – breaking ties to generational sins

For the past few years we as leadership in this church have been going through a process of Church Renewal. Patrick and I meet together online every week with pastors from across Canada and the world who have a heart for renewing the church. This movement was birthed out of a church called Southland in Steinbach Manitoba. Years ago they, as a church, realized that, although they were preaching the right message, lives were not being transformed because people were still in bondage. They started a Set Free Retreat based on Neil Anderson's material. It changed them as a church. Why is this so important?

At the heart of each one of these steps is repentance. Also, at the heart of both Neil Anderson's material and the Southland Set Free retreat, repentance is something that is done in the context of community. It is done with others.

I think that often one of the greatest problems with the church is the fact that we have made faith a solely private thing, just between us and God. You hear a message like this on repentance and you think to yourself "yes, I agree with this in principle" but then you walk away having done nothing about it. The power of the Set Free retreat or conference is that you do not simply learn it, you take the time to practice it! You do it.

Lack of repentance is the root cause of powerlessness in the church, in this materialistic, self-indulgent age. There can be no spiritual power in a non-repentant church -- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Repentance happens at salvation, but not just then. Repentance is not just a onetime event but a continual attitude. This is essential to live an authentic Christian life. You cannot say "I'm okay. I repented 20 years ago." Well that is great, but what about those sins of yesterday. It is never enough to say, "I have repented" because you repented in your past. It is needful to say, "I am repentant" because repentance is, indeed, an ongoing attitude. It is the continual removal of everything that builds up and keeps us from the close relationship with Jesus we need to have.

Jack Nicklaus is considered by most as the greatest golfer who has ever played the game. Once, when he was at the height of his career, he quit playing for 30 days to correct something with his game. He tried and tried but could not correct his swing. He did everything he could think of but to no success. Then he went back to the coach that taught him golf – he went right back to the basics. Through the help of that coach, his game straightened out. He went on to win more major tournaments than any golfer in history. There are times in our lives when we need to get back to the basics of our Christian faith. We need to go back to the day when Jesus saved us and set us free. We need to come with the same openness of heart, seeking the lordship of Jesus we talked about last week.

### 3. The Evidence

What is the fruit of repentance? What is the result in a believer's life? If I had to use one word for it, it would be the word GRACE. A person who has been convicted by their own sin is a person who is far less likely to point out the sins of others because they truly understand and have experienced forgiveness. Believers who have learned the grace of God and know it well tend to be far more willing to extend that grace to others.

2Co 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

When Billy Graham was driving through a small southern town, he was stopped by a policeman and charged with speeding. Graham admitted his guilt, but was told by the officer that he would have to appear in court. The judge asked, "Guilty, or not guilty?" When Graham pleaded guilty, the judge replied, "That'll be ten dollars -- a dollar for every mile you went over the limit." Suddenly the judge recognized the famous preacher. "You have violated the law," he said. "The fine must be paid, but I am going to pay it for you." He took a ten-dollar bill from his own wallet, attached it to the ticket, and then took Graham out and bought him a steak dinner! "That," said Billy Graham, "is how God treats repentant sinners!" And I might add, it's called God's grace!

God desires to have a relationship with us. John the Baptist told the people to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. When pressed as to what exactly that meant John replied,

Luke 3:11-14 ... "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same." 12 Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" 13 Don't collect any more than you are required to, he told them. 14 Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely -- be content with your pay."

The fruit than John the Baptist talked about was not some vague theological truth. It was practical. It is where the rubber meets the road. It reflected the daily life of ordinary people in practical ways. It meant living a life of generosity and being fair and honest with others.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. It was a church that was struggling. There was sin present and it was not being dealt with. Paul warns them that sin always has consequences. Then he wrote this to them;

2Co 13:5-6 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you -- unless, of course, you fail the test? 6 And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.

What is authentic faith? It is repentant faith.

Another word for repentant is the word penitent. In the movie Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, they are searching for the Holy Grail. They come to the place where the grail is kept, but in order to enter they must pass a series of deadly traps. Indy's father has been shot, so he knows that he has to move forward to find healing. The clue to the first trap is this: "The Breath of God. Only the penitent man will pass." He begins to repeat the phrase under his breath searching for its meaning, "Penitent man, penitent man, penitent, penitent. The penitent man is humble before God, He kneels before God. Kneel!" At that moment, as Indy falls to his knees, a giant blade swoops through where his neck was just a second before. It was through repentance that he was allowed entry to the healing that he needed.

As we come to this table this morning, where is your heart? We need to examine ourselves as we come. Not examine the people around you, we start by examining our own heart. Is there anything in my life that needs to change?

Did you hear the story about the elderly lady that had heard on the news about a car driving the wrong way on the interstate She was so worried that her husband was in danger that she called him on his cell phone to warn him "Claude you need to be extra careful coming home. The news just said there is a crazy person driving the wrong way on the interstate." "It's not just one person Ethel. Everyone is doing it!" If you are not pursuing God's agenda for your life in every area of your life then the first step is the step of repentance. Stop and turn around