

The Process of Repentance

Pretext: Matthew 3:1-2 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, **2** “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

- In theology (the study of God), there is a concept called the law of first mention. The law of first mention says that, to understand a particular word or doctrine, we must find the first place in Scripture where that word or doctrine is revealed and study that passage. The reasoning is that the Bible's first mention of a concept is the simplest and most straightforward presentation; doctrines are then more fully developed on that foundation. To fully understand an important and complex theological concept, Bible students are advised to begin with its “first mention.”
- When God prepares to enact a new covenant with His people after 400 years of silence, He takes a seasoned couple, Zacharias and Elizabeth, and allows them to conceive. This is a pattern for God, because we have seen Him solidify His covenant with Abram and Sarai by allowing them to birth Isaac in their old age. John the Baptist was born in a priestly bloodline, but had a prophetic anointing. His message was simple, **“REPENT FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND”**, **Matthew 3:2**. When Christ started His Kingdom ministry, He took His cousin's sermon and preached the same thing **“REPENT FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND”**, **Matthew 4:17**.
- Applying the law of first mention here, we must infer that the message of repentance is essential to embracing the Kingdom and Christ.
- **Repentance** (*Metanoeō* *GK* “to turn”) is an act of acknowledging past wrongdoing, expressing regret or contrition, and committing to correct behavior and obedience to God. It is a transformative process that involves turning away from sin or transgression and turning back to God. Lesley DiFransico, “Repentance,” in Lexham Theological Wordbook, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).
- The enemy of true repentance is **attrition**. This refers to the feeling of remorse, self-reproach, and sorrow for sin that is generated by the fear of punishment, without any wish or resolve to forsake sinning.

- The enemy has no problem with you feeling bad about what you've done, just as long as those bad feelings don't equate to change. And this is why the message of repentance that John the Baptist, Jesus the Christ, and all of his holy apostles were merely echoes of all the prophets who came before them, beckoning the people of God to come away from their own lust and desires, and seek the presence of the God who created them, loves them, and sustains them.
- One of the **most notable** examples of the call-and-response dynamic of repentance is found in the account of King David and Bathsheba.
- It was **a** time of year when kings normally went to war; however, King David decided to remain in his palace, and while doing so, he was arrested by the beautiful Bathsheba. Promptly, he calls for his servant to bring her to him. He has his way with her and then sends her away. She becomes pregnant, and instead of taking responsibility for his actions, he calls on her husband, Uriah, to come from the battleground with hopes that he would have a "good time" with his wife. However, David did not account for Uriah's integrity, for the whole time he was back home. He did not return to his house, but slept at the king's door (2 Samuel 11:9). So, He rewards Uriah's integrity by putting him on the front line and hastening his imminent demise.
- And now, David, feeling as if all is well with the world, meets with the Prophet Nathan. I must pause here and parenthetically say that we all need **prophetic accountability**. We all have the capacity to "*do what seems right in our own eyes*" (Judges 21:25), but I pray that we all be blessed to have prophetic people in our lives who can hold us accountable, even in the areas of our blind spots. Once Nathan rehearses the scenario to David and further reveals that he is the culprit, as a man after God's own heart, something deeply ruptures in David, which causes him to pen what we now know as the 51st Psalm. In this song, we see the process of repentance that we all should adopt as we strive to be the people God has called us to be.
- In verses 1 and 2, we see **contrition**. This speaks of adopting a heart posture that aligns with the heart of God concerning sin. I'm coming away from my sin because I realize my sin hurts God, and goes against his will for my life. This is not punitive; it is purposeful.
- In verses 3 through 6, we see your **recognition**. We must acknowledge our sins and lay them at the feet of our forgiving God. If we are to be a repentant people, we

cannot shift blame, gaslight, or make excuses for what we've done. Lord, I did it. I did it because I wanted to, and I acknowledge that I'm wrong.

- In verses 7 through 12, we see **restoration**. This is the process where we submit to the Holy Spirit for cleansing. The broken places in our lives are addressed and mended. Ties with sin and shame are severed, and our heart is cleansed. We emerge with the joy of salvation and a willing spirit. We must note, however, that we cannot restore ourselves. We must trust the spirit of God to bring spiritual and professional voices into our lives to help us reach a place of True restoration.
- In verses 13 through 17, we see the concept of **restitution**. This is not merely paying back, it's actually paying forward. It's removing the weeds that sin has sewn in the proverbial garden of our lives and sowing good seeds that will bring about a greater harvest.
- And finally, in verses 18 and 19, we see **transformation**. This is the merciful hand of God, responding to the earnest plea of man. We serve a God who is powerful enough to make you better than what we are, but we have to be willing to come away from who we were.