

“Repentance”

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Psalm 96; Mark 9.14-29
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This is the good news that we have received, in which we stand, and by which we are saved: Christ died for our sins, was buried, was raised on the third day, and appeared first to the women, then to Peter and the Twelve, and then to many faithful witnesses. We believe Jesus is the Christ, the Anointed One of God, the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from the dead, in whom all things hold together, in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell by the power of the Spirit. Christ is the head of the body, the church, and by the blood of the cross reconciles all things to God. Amen.

Stuart Townend, a British Christian worship leader wrote:

How deep the Father's love for us
How vast beyond all measure
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure
How great the pain of searing loss
The Father turns His face away
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the Man upon a cross
My sin upon His shoulders Ashamed,

I hear my mocking voice Call out among the scoffers
It was my sin that held Him there Until it was accomplished
His dying breath has brought me life I know that it is finished

I will not boast in anything
No gifts, no power, no wisdom
But I will boast in Jesus Christ
His death and resurrection
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer
But this I know with all my heart
His wounds have paid my ransom

Lent is a time of particular focus on repentance, which does not mean that we atone for our sins, or even that we feel deep shame about them. Repentance is our response to the fact that Jesus atoned for our sins and bore our shame on the cross.

The word “repentance” has a negative connotation in our culture. To say that someone needs to repent implies they have done something really bad, and should feel really bad about it. While that may be true in some respect, the call to repentance is fundamentally good news. I read, “Repentance from the beginning of time to this present hour has been, and remains, the most positive Word from the heart of God.”

Because God made us for himself, our highest good is to repent and turn to God. In the Old Testament, the sins of God’s people and their lack of repentance led to their exile. God ordained their ruin and captivity at the hand of Pagan nations. It was horrific at every level: physical, national, cultural, and spiritual devastation. As awful as it sounds, it was actually a demonstration of God’s love. As a father disciplines his children, “the Lord disciplines the one he loves” (Hebrews 12:6). The point of discipline is correction and restoration.

Paul says it is God’s kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4). God calls us to himself, convicts us of our sins, comforts us with his love, and changes us by his grace. Our repentance begins and ends with God! When we make it about what we will do to make things right with God.

Repentance is not a system of works- righteousness. Rather, it is a means of experiencing the abundant grace of God toward us in Christ. Grace exposes our desire to be good enough and digs to the root of our sins. Who we really are—that is the realm in which grace intends to go to work, to renovate our lives and help us work out our salvation with fear and trembling.

When we repent we also express remorse: “I can’t believe I did that.” Feelings of shame and guilt are natural, but the Bible says there are two kinds of grief: worldly and godly (2

Corinthians 7:10). “Worldly grief” turns us in on self so that we are primarily concerned with our feelings and self-interests. So we feel bad, but only because we got caught. We are troubled, but only until the negative attention goes away. A common symptom of worldly grief is self-loathing: If we can just feel bad enough, or punish ourselves enough, we can make up for what we’ve done and appease God’s wrath against our sin.

The one who has godly grief understands that her sin is against God as well as others, and that it reflects a deeper wickedness in her heart.

True repentance always terminates on Jesus. It does not wallow in self-loathing or delight in self-flagellation. Rather, it allows an honest sense of our sinfulness to drive us toward the depth of Christ’s mercy in the gospel.

In this season, take a few moments and confess to God those areas where you feel ashamed, guilty or where you know you need to improve. Thank God for his grace and mercy in the gospel that frees us from being slaves to these things.

PRAYER

Merciful God, through your love and mercy, you breathed the breath of life into the dust, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. In this time of repentance, restore to us the joy of our salvation and strengthen us to face our mortality, so that we may confidently obtain your mercy, in Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and always. Amen.