

## Repenting In An Obstinate World (2020 Focus) Pleasant Plains 3-1-2020AM Nick Angel

- **\*READ Acts 2:36-38\*** The standard mode of operation for us when it comes to this text is to emphasize the role that baptism places in the salvation process and forgiveness of one's sins. This is usually done because of the lack of emphasis and even direct teaching against baptism as part of the salvation process, so I can see why this is what we tend to focus on. However, we would be sorely remiss to ignore or even simply fail to properly emphasize the equally important component of repentance. The commandment isn't for these people to only be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, but there is also the all important step of repenting. But what exactly is repentance?
- Some would say that repentance is simply being sorry or feeling the emotion of guilt. While I believe that feeling sorry and guilty is part of the repentance process (**II Corinthians 7:8**), I would contend that there is more to it than that and that is seen in **II Corinthians 7:9-11**. Paul was rejoicing because it was the guilt and sorrow of the Corinthians sin that led them to true repentance which was seen in the way that the Corinthians were now behaving. Therefore, I would offer this up as a means of definition for what it means to repent. **"Repentance: To feel such sorrow for sin or fault as to be disposed to change one's life for the better."** We can see that repentance not only includes the mind and how we feel and think, but it also includes allowing those thoughts and feelings to lead us to a change in action in what we think, say, and do.
- This seems to be the process those in **Acts 2** went through when they were confronted with their grievous sin of crucifying the Son of God, and it is the same process we ought to go through when we recognize our shortcomings and find ourselves in need of change. However, we sadly recognize that those 3,000 that repented were only a small fraction of the estimated number of Jews who were in Jerusalem on that day of Pentecost. Some estimates put the number at 100,000 with other estimates being even double that amount.
- And sadly...things haven't changed all that much in our world today. Our world, as a whole, continues to be obstinate or opposed to the need for repentance within their lives. It can, therefore, be difficult for us to always be willing to repent when that times comes because we see so many all around us unwilling to do so. As we spend this year focusing on giving every effort to be a godly people in an ungodly world, we are going to spend our focus lesson this month thinking upon how we can be a people who are ready and willing to repent if and when those circumstances arise in our lives. The world is often totally against is and we're going to seek to answer that question of why before we look and the importance of us being willing to do so within our own lives.

### **I. Why is the world so obstinate towards repentance?**

#### **A. The pride of the world hinders it from repenting of sin because that means admitting wrong doing.**

1. In this first half of the lesson, I want us to see how the actions of our world today are nothing new when it comes to this subject, and we are going to do so by examining the behavior of the religious leaders of Jesus's day. They had and the world today has a pride problem that hinders them from a willingness to consider and/or admit that a wrong has been committed.
2. Pride was certainly something that was a problem for the Scribes and Pharisees in Jesus's day, and He addresses this problem during His scathing rebukes of the religious leaders in **Matthew 23:1-7**. These men were sitting in a place of great influence in the chair of Moses, and instead of being thankful and humble in that position, they behaved in prideful ways by wearing larger than usual phylacteries and longer than usual tassels. All of this, along with sitting in the best seats and being called "Rabbi", were done to fuel their egos, and those egos led them to be people who Jesus described as *"whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity."* (**Matthew 23:27**)

3. The pride of the Scribes and Pharisees caused them to not see their own sins, and this is the same problem we see all throughout the world. Far too many people see themselves as infallible. They do not acknowledge their shortcomings, faults, and mistakes, but instead they try to pass the blame onto others or just practice the greatest forms of self-denial. Living in such a way will never lead a single person to the point where he sees his need for repentance.
- B. Admitting wrong doing demands recognizing the authority of another person or standard.**
1. Building on the first point, we need to recognize that the world is so against repentance because repentance would mean their acknowledge of their falling short of the standard that has been established by another person. Again, this can be seen as a major problem in the way the Scribes and Pharisees operated in the first century.
  2. **Mark 7:1-13** gives us a glimpse into this shortcoming of the Scribes and Pharisees. They observed the disciples of Jesus eating bread with unwashed hands which was against the tradition of the elders. The question Jesus about this in such a way that is obvious that they are criticizing the disciples for this breaking of elders' traditions. Jesus comes back with a rebuke of His own against them for their vain worship through upholding their own traditions as if they were divinely given commandments. The big issue that Jesus highlights is their breaking of actual divinely given law through their own traditions. They only acknowledged their own standard and refused to respect the standard of God.
  3. This problem remains present in our world in the 21st century through the way that many refuse to live by God's standard and only live according to their own. Not the first person is going to be sorrowful for going against a standard that they refuse to acknowledge or respect. Just as the Pharisees refused to repent of their own breaking of God's law based upon the establishment of their own, so does the world refuse to repent for falling short of the divinely given standard that is revealed in the Word of God.
- C. Recognizing the authority of another only makes sense when that other person is God, and the world simply does not want to acknowledge God or His authority.**
1. The reasoning behind part of the problem that the Scribes and Pharisees had with Jesus was their unwillingness to acknowledge Him as being the Messiah of God who was, in fact, God. If they would not acknowledge Him as God then they surely wouldn't give much attention to what He had to say or teach. This is a problem that we have seen even in just the first couple of chapters in our study through Mark's Gospel.
  2. In **Mark 2:1-12**, Jesus is teaching in an overcrowded house when friends of a paralyzed man lowered him down before Jesus through the roof of the home they were all gathered in. Jesus responds to the faith of these men by telling the man that his sins were forgiven. The Scribes who were gathered were understandably disturbed by a man saying that He could forgive sins, so Jesus shows them His right to do so through the power given to Him by God. Sadly, the signs performed by Jesus were not enough for these religious leaders to truly recognize Him as God, and it doesn't take long for them to begin their plans to kill Him. (**Mark 3:6**)
  3. For many people in the world today, there is little to nothing that will convince them of God's existence or their need to acknowledge His standard for them because they simply don't want to change. They are completely content with living life just as they currently are, and they have no interest in anyone coming into their lives and causing them to change the way they are living...even if it were the Creator of the universe. How can anyone get to this point in their thinking? I can only be a result of pride completely hardening the heart, and Jesus calls us to be different in this regard from the world, but let's now consider why this is the case.

## II. Why is repentance so important in the lives of disciples of Jesus Christ?

A. Repentance is the catalyst for the change that takes place when we decide to live for Jesus.

1. If we go back to the text of **Acts 2**, the thing that changed the thinking of those who were gathered for Pentecost was their acknowledgement of Jesus as God. Peter masterfully walks those who are present through the logical thought process that gave evidence for Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. Him being recognized as such was the beginning point for the crowd's recognition that they had really messed up in being complicit with Him being put to death. This is the point where the people begin to feel that deep sorrow for the wrong that they had committed, and it is at this point that they are willing to ask what they can do to make right or rectify that which they had done.
2. I want us to recognize that they realized they had to change. That recognition of a need for a change is vitally important because without realizing our need to change, we can never be saved by Jesus. Again in **Mark 2:17**, we read that Jesus came to save those who are sick and in need of a doctor. This isn't to be understood in a physical sense, but instead it is to be understood in a spiritual sense. Do we see ourselves in need of a spiritual doctor who can make us spiritually healthy again? If we recognize this as being true then we are moving in the right direction, but what is it about our lives prior to Christ that moves us in the direction of needing to repent and change our ways?
3. The problem with our lives prior to Christ is that we were living contrary to Jesus on account of the sins that we had committed. Paul explains in **Romans 3:9-23** that there is no truly and wholly righteous person on earth which means that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. The penalty for this sin is death (**Romans 6:23**), and we are in no position to inherit the kingdom of God. However, all of that can be changed when we are willing to repent of our transgressions and turn to God in Faith. In **I Corinthians 6:9-11**, Paul states that the very saints in Corinth had turned from sinful lifestyles towards Jesus Christ, and they found sanctification and justification in Him. But that wasn't a one time thing...it was only the start!

B. Living with a penitent heart aides us in leaving sin behind.

1. These brethren in Corinth WERE those types of people, but through their repentance they were changed, and they were to continue to stay changed! Those actions that were keeping them out of the kingdom of God would once again disqualify them from the kingdom of God if they returned to willful living in those ways. This is why we need to embrace repentance as a lifestyle and not simply a one time thing that takes place in our journey on this earth.
2. We need to feel sorrow for our sins to the point that we refuse to ever go back to that place where we were living in them. This means that we need to have a complete change in the way that we see ourselves and what we ought to be doing in this life. Paul writes in **Romans 12:1,2**, *"Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to **present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.**"*
3. The two key elements of repentance are clearly seen in these two verses. God's will is that we present our bodies (meaning our actions) as living sacrifices before Him, and this is able to take place through our minds being changed. This changing of the mind will cause us to leave sin far in the rearview mirror and move us only ever toward and closer to our Savior. We are to leave behind our former way of rebellion. ***"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy."*** (I Peter 1:14-16)

C. Our penitent hearts will help us to remain committed to our faiths through not growing hard-hearted & prideful.

1. This type of lifestyle will only help us as we continue to live for Jesus. We cannot, even for a moment, allow for our hearts to begin to think that we are at the point where we no longer need to feel sorrow for those moments when we trip up and stumble short of God's standard for us. We must continue to take our conduct seriously or else we might fall into the condemnation of those that are written of in **Hebrews 6:4-6**. The Hebrews writers states, *"For it is impossible to renew to repentance those who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, who tasted God's good word and the powers of the coming age, and who have fallen away. This is because, to their own harm, they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding him up to contempt."*
2. I do not believe this strong language is used to describe those who transgress God's law, recognize their mistake, and turn back to Him in repentance. Instead, these difficult verses are reserved for those who have stopped living with penitent hearts. These are people whose hearts have been hardened and calloused to the point that they no longer care for God's standard for them as disciples of Jesus. Instead of living in holiness, these people have left the way of righteousness and now openly live in rebellion and actually end up recrucifying Jesus through their sinful lifestyle.
3. The Hebrew writer uses strong language when he states that it is impossible to renew these people to repentance. Is it because God's grace and mercy are insufficient? Of course not! Instead, these people have hearts so hard that they are now going to live like the rest of the world who refuse to acknowledge God's will for them. Those who had once escaped the world have now returned to it and the condemnation they once escaped is now in play once again. How said for those who have tasted God's grace to spit in His face and turn away from Him in pursuit of vain pleasures. May God grant them softened hearts and us resilient hearts to never fall to such a place.

As we can see, there is a wide gap between those who are willing to repent before the Lord and those who simply refuse. Which side we find ourselves on will be determined by what kind of heart we possess. Will we be prideful and refuse to see our need for change? Or will we humble ourselves before the Almighty hand of God and acknowledge our need for a Savior. May God grant each of us hearts full of repentance so that we might receive the blessings He desires to give us, and may the words of Paul remain upon our minds as we live in the amazing grace of Christ. May we be separate from the world in our willingness to accept God's mercy through humbling ourselves to repent when we fall short of His glory! *"What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 6:1,2)*