

Repent!

11/3/19 - Pastor Tom Tweedle

Matthew 4:17 - NIV - **"...Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."**

The Message - "Change your life. God's kingdom is here."

When Jesus first started preaching, this is what He said. He had some small conversations before this point. He was baptized. He was tempted in the desert by Satan. But the first words he said to the crowds were "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." I want to take some time this morning to focus on what it means to repent, and also our motivation, about the kingdom of heaven being near.

We hear the words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" and we immediately think of that crazy guy on the corner with the sign and the megaphone. Yet it is what Jesus led off with. So I think it deserves our attention and study.

The Greek word for 'repent', *metanaeo*, is a verb which means "to change one's mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins." Conversion and reformation are also good terms to use for this Greek word. Again, it is a verb. Which means action takes place. It isn't a belief. It isn't a thought or feeling. It is something that someone does. Jesus is calling for a change of actions. It is not just the changing of someone's mind, but a change of mind that dictates a change in action.

F.F. Bruce, a New Testament theologian stated that **"Repentance involves a turning with contrition from sin to God; the repentant sinner is in the proper condition to accept the divine forgiveness."**

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Throughout the Bible, and the New Testament specifically, a changing of one's mind is what drives one's actions. Romans 12:2 states, **Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.** The way we are not like the world is by changing how we think. If we change how we think, we change how we live.

The idea of repentance is not just something that is driven by the logical assumption of a need for change. If anything, it is something that is driven by something deeper. An urging, something that comes from the depths of **feeling**. (This can be difficult because frequently we are told to not be driven by our feelings. You are allowed to have feelings, you just aren't allowed to be controlled by them.) The words, "heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins" is something not to be taken lightly. It is looking at one's sin, and reeling with revulsion at what one has done. A visceral reaction. It is shame and regret. Possibly even fear of others finding out just how bad you are. Let me tell you this morning, if you are fearful of something coming out about you to your family, the rest of the world, the church, your pastor... then you are a prime candidate for repentance this morning.

When I was a young boy who committed some heinous act against someone else, whether it be hitting my brother, or, well, usually it was hitting my brother... anyway, whenever I would do something like that, my father would bring me before my brother, and there was something I always had to do. And he drilled in the difference between how he did this and how others did this.

Today, when one child wrongs another, it is usually, "Say you're sorry", and also possibly, "promise not to do it again."

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My dad was different. "Sorry" meant nothing. "Sorry" was lip-service. "Sorry" had no substance to it. What we had to do was ask for forgiveness. "Will you please forgive me, for bashing you across the face with my mathbook from school? I'll never do it again."

I understand what my dad was teaching me. The purpose of forgiveness. How it is a gift that can be asked for and received. Never earned or bought, though it can be sought out. And how true healing of a wrong comes out of forgiveness.

But there was something in me that didn't quite like it. I still wanted to say "sorry." I would start out, "I'm sorry" and pause. And my dad would quip in from behind, "Sorry doesn't cut it!" And I would say, "I know! I'm not done yet! And then I would ask for forgiveness, and promise not to do it again.

But "sorry" was important for me. If I'm not sorry about what I've done, why ask for forgiveness? Because it's the formula I have to go through now that I've gotten in trouble? I'm sorry (pun-intended), but that's weak! If I was never caught, would I still ask for forgiveness? I can guarantee you that I won't be asking for forgiveness if I'm not sorry and if I'm not caught.

You see, I think sorrow is what drives our repentance. My simple definition that I give the teenagers, and well, anybody is this... You see, repentance is when you were headed down one way, and then decide to turn around, change direction, and go a different way. Why choose to be different if there is no emotion in it? Some say following Jesus is simply a head choice. But I say if your heart isn't in it, if it isn't wanting something more, something different, something better, then ultimately you will just continue down the same path you are on.

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In my free time, I like to run. Let me rephrase that. I like to pretend that I like running. It is sort of a love/hate relationship that I have with running. I really like the long-term effects. I usually enjoy how I feel after I've run a few miles. And there are even brief moments while running that I feel like I am flying through the air, enjoying every single step. But most of the time, I have to drag myself to start running, and especially during the first half mile or so, I'm like, "Why am I doing this?!?!"

One of the things I check before running, besides the temperature, is the wind, and even more specifically, the direction the wind is blowing. Back in Syracuse, there was a park I liked to run at beside a very large lake, Onondaga Lake. And lemme tell you, that wind can blow really hard right off the lake. There are times when I start off running, and the wind is blowing in my face, 10, 15 miles per hour. I rarely go running if it is blowing in my face more than 20 miles per hour. As I run, it's like I'm pushing and struggling with all my might. I feel like giving up, and am just trundling along. "Why am I running? I hate it so much..." And then, I get to my turnaround point. I turn around, head in the other direction, and it's like I start to fly! It's like, "Wow! This is great! I love running!" I'll be running a mile 30 to 45 seconds faster than when I started running.

It's the same way in our Christian lives at times. We often know the direction that God wants us to go and the way He wants us to live, but instead we go the other direction and do the things He says not to do. When we do that, we struggle. Life is harder. It's like we are pushing up against something that is always blowing back against us. Our relationship with God is strained. We don't feel like we are growing and like we are barely moving. We are just struggling to get through life, and we know this isn't

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the way God designed it. But repentance happens when we decide to turn around, and go in the direction God wants us to go in. It says in **Acts 3:19** that “times of refreshing will come from the Lord” when we repent. It is refreshing to repent! When we repent, we receive a life better than the one we were living before!

Jesus was about new life. He was about living life to the fullest. He wasn't about getting by. He came that we might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10). But one of the greatest ways we can have that abundant life, that full life, that whole and complete life, is by repenting. We reap what we sow. And if we sow seeds of destruction by the way we are living our life, we will reap destruction as we continue down that path. But Jesus calls us to something different, something greater, a path less traveled by most. A path of selflessness, of humility, of showing and sharing one's weaknesses. And when we walk that path... when we are full of sorrow for our past and are driven to our knees in shame... when we ask for forgiveness by Jesus and have our slate wiped clean... that is when we experience the Kingdom of Heaven.

So here now we have the question, “What is the Kingdom of Heaven? The phrase, “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Kingdom of God” are interchangeable in the Bible. In Luke 17:21, Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven was among us.

The past month the pastoral staff has been doing some planning for next year. I've also taken a little time to look back on 2019. We will have our Annual Business Meeting in March, and I'll be asked to give an account for the ministries I've

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responsible for. Talking about what happened the past year, and casting some vision for the upcoming year.

I asked myself, "What did 2019 look like so far? What did I feel about 2019?" And to be honest with all of you, I felt loss...

We have had so many dear people pass away this year. It has been a hard year for many of us. Just getting the news and sharing it with others is difficult. That people's lives have taken such a drastic turn because those they love aren't here anymore. But life isn't just about 'here.' It's not about this earthly kingdom.

Jesus said the Kingdom of Heaven was among us. Despite the losses, the Kingdom of God is near. And this is what starts to get me excited. You see, this is why I'm a pastor. This is why I'm here at Calvary. I wanna see the Kingdom of Heaven among you. What's the kingdom of heaven? Well, back in the day when Jesus was walking on this earth, people were thinking the Kingdom of Heaven is when God would be established on his throne. That the rest of the world would bow down to King Jesus. That Israel would be the world's superpower, no longer under Roman rule and tyranny. Something they could see and tangibly point to, that anyone could see with their eyes. But Jesus told everyone, "Yo, listen up! The Kingdom of heaven is among you! It's in your midst!" To some, it was inside of them!

To be blameless, to be shame-free, to be called not guilty, innocent, and righteous... That is the Kingdom of Heaven. To live out God's ways... to experience the peace that comes from following Him... that is being in His Kingdom. Jesus was spreading the Good News! That the poor in spirit are rich! That the meek shall inherit the earth. He was healing people of blindness, deafness, skin disease, crippling handicaps, and death!

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He was telling people of life after death, of an eternal relationship with God the Father in heaven. That is the Kingdom of Heaven.

You see, for me, the Kingdom of Heaven is someone who was a slave to something, and now they are free. It is someone being released from a drug addiction, and now they are no longer having to lie about who they are, why they are out late at night, or where their money is going. The Kingdom of Heaven is a husband being patient with his wife, and loving and cherishing her and working hard to rekindle the love in their marriage, the same way God is patient with us and tries to woo us to Himself. The Kingdom of Heaven is children going to sleep peacefully at night because they know they are dearly loved by their parents, and they have an assurance and security of their family's foundation in Christ. The Kingdom of Heaven is God's will happening here on earth. Invading and breaking the norms of society and bringing a peace that no other drug, no other money, no other relationship, resource, or thing can bring!

That is why we are here. That is why we gather on Sunday mornings. That is why we share the Good News with even the most lost of souls. Because the Kingdom of God is near, and you can be a part of it, only if you repent!

Some of you are extremely broken this morning. Some of you may be numb, and go "yeah, I've done bad things. It's a part of who I am. I'm not as bad as so and so." To which I say to you: Don't you dare compare yourself to others! The only one you can compare yourself to is Jesus, and trust me, you fall short. And don't be numb, either. Do not accept your current state or condition. Don't try to justify who you are or where you've come from. Justifying your sin is the pride getting in your way of you feeling sorry for your sin. It's time to put that aside.

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Now is a great time to start a new era in your life, and experience more of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now many of you may not feel a lick of shame right now, and that may be completely fine. Your sins are bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus that was shed when he died on the cross. You have a great understanding that nothing is held against you because Jesus paid it all, and you can stand before God Almighty one day, resting in the assurance that He will accept you with open arms and not cast you into hell. You know that you are flawed, yet eyed by God as something unique, beautiful, and pure. You are not perfect, but are striving to live your life differently than you did in the past, now following the Lord and His Word. And that is outstanding. You may be living a true life of freedom. But we still need to remind ourselves, that until we stand before God and are fully glorified in His presence, we are still fallen creatures in a broken world. And we still sin. Not as much as we may have before, but we still are not perfect.

In Revelation 2, God calls the church in Ephesus to repent. These are Christians, whom He is calling to repentance. When Jesus said to repent, he was calling us all towards a lifestyle of repentance.

I think when looking at the formula for repentance, the best one to look at may be David, in Psalms 51.

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

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³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

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¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

One can sense the extreme sorrow David has for his actions. He confesses his sin against God. Things take a turn halfway through. Up until verse 10, he is sharing his deep sorrow for his sin. But in verse 10, he asks God to help him turn from his sin and follow God. **(READ VERSE 10 AGAIN)**. He first asks God to cleanse him. Then in verse 12 he asks for God to restore to him the joy of his salvation. Sin so often dirties us up and sucks any joy away we have for God or following Him. We need to be asked to be cleansed, and for our joy to be restored. Good news: He will do that.

Another thing we can pull from this text is that David understands that God is not after religion, but after a broken heart. During this time in history, offering burnt animal sacrifices was a part of the religious system. David realizes those religious rituals aren't what he needed to be brought back to God. God was after David's heart. God wanted David to experience true repentance, not some religious ritual. When we sin and rebel against God, we don't need religion to help us get back to God. We need to practice true repentance. We need to confess our sin, experience godly sorrow over our sin, and resolve to turn from our sin back to God.

Now, to be honest, that may look different to different people, but I want to give you the opportunity this morning to respond to the message. **(Ask worship team to come up)**

I have mixed feelings sometimes on people leaving church feeling happy. I think some people need to leave in sorrow sometimes. Now don't get me wrong, we shouldn't stay in

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sorrow. But it is that sorrow which can drive our motivation for change. Our motivation that we have let God down. But because Jesus died on the cross and gave us another chance, how can we not live for Him? How can we not change? You see, it's a road; a progression.

2 Corinthians 7:10 - Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Some of you may need to express your sorrow to God. You need to cry out and ask for forgiveness. But I want to make this clear, we do not stay in this place. We leave it and move on. Yes, there are times that we need to come back, beat our chest, be contrite, and ask for forgiveness again. But we do not stay in a place of shame. The Holy Spirit brings conviction. That conviction brings about sorrow, and change. The devil brings condemnation. Condemnation brings a stupor of hopelessness, which brings no action and defeat.

Mark 1:15 - "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

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Small Group Notes on "Repent!" 11-3-19

Scripture used:

- **Matthew 4:17**, Mark 1:15 (Repent, the kingdom is near)
- Romans 12:2 (be transformed)
- **Acts 3:19** (refreshing from the Lord)
- Luke 17:20-21 (Where is God's Kingdom?)
- Revelation 2:5 (asks church in Ephesus to repent)
- **Psalms 51:1-5, 9-17** (David's prayer)
- **2nd Corinthians 7:10** (Godly sorrow brings repentance)

SG Discussion Points/Questions:

- Have you ever experienced a sign-holding, megaphone-yelling street corner "preacher?" In what ways do you think Jesus differed from them when he preached "Repent"?
- Acts 3:19 - What are the different ways in which someone might receive "refreshing from the Lord" when they repent?
- What should/does the Kingdom of Heaven look like in your life?
- Read through Psalm 51

Possible action points:

- Display sorrow and ask someone for forgiveness.
- Memorize part/all of Psalm 51. Use it as a model for prayer. Meditate on what it is to have a clean heart and right spirit and ask the Holy Spirit to create that in you daily.
- Find someone to help hold you accountable and create practical steps in repenting and turning from your sin(s).

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