

V.REPENT

53.Repent, Read Mt 4:12-17, Mk 1:15, Mk 6:12

So much of what Jesus did was in response to some person, fact or situation. He fed thousands because they Were hungry, healed probably hundreds because they Were disabled or sick or leprous, raised people from death as He encountered dead people, cast out demons as He encountered the possessed, answered questions, reacted to things He saw His disciples doing. Even walking on the water was in response to a logistical issue,

Once Jesus asked His disciples who He was. Once Jesus took three disciples up on the mountain to witness the transfiguration. Three times He prophesied that He would suffer. At least twice and perhaps more times He sent His disciples out to preach and heal and cast out demons.

The exceptions to these notable events are instructive. People are notable for what they did in certain circumstances, but what people "are about" is what they do the rest of the time. So what was Jesus about I ask.

What things did He do regularly? On occasion Jesus led His disciples away from Israel for rest. He traveled to Jerusalem for the feasts. He Went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He prayed in lonely places. He gave money to the poor. He had His disciples baptize people. He preached a regular message. One could say that He regularly healed and cast out demons.

Basically He led a holy life. Two things stand out as not being part of the holy life of a truly God loving Jew. First the miracles, healings, and casting out of demons, these Were not things that a God loving Jew could do. Next the preaching, a God loving Jew would not be a preacher necessarily.

The miraculous healings etc. Were signs that Jesus was from God and that God loved His people and was working to bring them back to Him At this point Jesus message is seen as what He was really all about. See Mark 1:38-39, "...so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." There you have it.

But I think few Christians could tell you what message Jesus preached. The gospel writers do not make much of it. They emphasize the miracles and the remarkable things Jesus said. They probably took for granted that people would know Jesus message. The message is very important. It is not emphasized but it is there if you have eyes to see it. The message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

I don't hear much preaching about repentance these days. It is not interesting, it is not inclusive. It makes us sound dated, intolerant and judgmental Perhaps the reaction in Jesus day was only slightly more positive. Most of the Jews knew they Were sinners. Most of the Americans do not.

Jesus preached this not to be popular but to save lives. Unless you repent you will die in your sin. Then comes judgment Then comes condemnation. Then comes the Weeping and gnashing of teeth, and that, forever. Jesus was trying to save as many as He could. Salvation begins with repentance

Repentance is this. you turn away from your old ways of doing things. you do this because you know they are wrong. you may have deep remorse and even loath what you have done. That helps, but it is turning away from it, being done with it that is most important. "I have done wrong. I will stop doing wrong." Repentance is resolving to yourself that you are done sinning.

Now read Jn 8:1-11. Focus on Jesus words in verse 11. Jesus does not condemn her. He did not come to condemn. But there will be a day of judgment On that day she will die. She will die unless she did what Jesus told her to do. "Leave your life of sin." See Jn 5:14. To the man who was an invalid for 38 years Jesus said "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." What is worse than being an invalid for 38 years? Being in hell forever. What can the man do to avoid being

thrown into hell? Stop sinning.

Now right away some will say, "We can't stop sinning. We need God's help in Jesus to stop sinning." True enough but after we get God's help through Jesus will we stop sinning? If nothing is impossible for God and we resolve in our hearts and minds not to sin, must we go on sinning. Let us try really hard to stop sinning. Then God's help through Jesus will be ever so much more effective. Certainly more effective than believing that sin is inevitable so why fight it?

That is what repentance is. We leave behind our life of sin. If we do not we can not be saved. See Mt 7:21-27. If we keep doing evil we will not be able to stand on the day of judgment we will die the second death.

I am not saying that we must earn our salvation by doing good rather than evil. Jesus earned our salvation through a life of perfect righteousness. We earned by sinning eternal punishment for ourselves. He exchanged the reward He earned for the punishment we earned. We accept this exchange by taking Jesus as our savior and lord and by belonging to Him and by turning away from sin, which is repentance

Even so we can disqualify ourselves from salvation if we will not stop sinning. See Mt 7: 21-27 again. The evil doers Jesus condemns must have taken Jesus as their savior if they took Him to be their lord. But they did not stop sinning so they did not belong to Him, and He never knew them. They continued to do evil and lost their salvation.

54. Repentance is better than righteous talk. Read Mt 21:23-46.

Jesus does not object that the chief priests and elders of the people have the right to ask what is the source of His authority. After all what is to keep any fool from teaching the even more foolish something totally foolish.

Jesus brings up John the Baptist. He was an example of a fool to the chief priests and elders. But what did they do with John? If John was a fool preaching nonsense they did nothing to stop him. If John preached God's truth, they did nothing to embrace it. Perhaps Jesus was leveling this criticism at them. That they neither protect the people from false prophets nor do they accept prophets from God.

Jesus could also be drawing a comparison between Himself and John. He could be saying, "you did nothing about John, why trouble me?"

In fact Jesus is very disappointed with what they did with John the Baptist, and this is a good time to bring up the subject. He lets them have another chance at evaluating John. They do not do any better this time. They refuse to agree that John was from God.

The chief priests and elders of the people correctly conclude that It is better to repent of doing wrong and begin doing right than to start out doing right and then begin to do wrong. This concept is written big in Ezekiel (18:21-28)

The future and the past are not important. What is important is the present. Why is this so? Because you have little control over your future and no control over the past. Righteousness is about the choices you make. you can only make choices now.

Jesus draws a comparison between the two sons in His parable to the tax collectors and prostitutes on the one hand and the chief priests and elders on the other. The former took advantage of the invitation to repent God had offered through John. The latter did not. They are like the second son who said he would do right but did not do it, who started out right but did not finish.

In addition Jesus points out their extreme waywardness in that, the priests and elders saw the tax collectors and prostitutes repent, and refused to confess that this was a miracle of God. Even though

they know how hard it is for people to change. It proves that Jesus was right in saying that they Were not really interested in God or His work. This proves that they needed to repent as much as anyone else.

Jesus goes on to tell the parable of the vineyard tenants. In this it is clear God has judged the people of Israel as being rebellious and no longer the people of God. In the face of this judgment to come the leaders of Israel still will not repent and submit to God's will.

And so God has created a new nation to be His people. These are the Christians. But the Christians must watch or they also will lose their place. The leaders of Israel ignored God's power at work when, through John, He led the tax collectors and prostitutes to repentance. We must be careful that we do not miss out on seeing God at work. For if we do not recognize God at work we may miss fulfilling His will in us.

The Pharisees chief priests and elders of the people Were not really interested in God so they passed out of God's will. If we are not really interested in God we also will pass out of His will. How can this happen? When the focus of our lives is on something other than God we are not watching for God. When we focus our attention on things such as enjoying ourselves, achieving our goals and ambitions, worrying about the future, dwelling in the past, or just the struggle to get by we are not focused on God.

Many people are only interested in what God will do for them. The idea of eternal life in paradise sounds good but it is not as important as the present. If God will not help us with our problems such as health , family, our past, money or what ever frustrates us, we soldier on without Him. We miss the point. If God is not focused on our problems we should not focus on them neither. We should focus on God. If God will not help us with our desires for a mate, a child, a career, money, success, fame, having fun all the time, we pursue these things without Him. We miss the point. If God is not focused on our desires we should not focus on them neither. We should focus on God. The things we focus our attention on are our gods. If God has our attention for just a few minutes during the Weekly worship service while the rest of the hour we spend thinking about our problems and/or desires, He certainly is not our God. And He will leave us to our gods to save us. And they will not

save us.

55. Don't wait to repent. Read Lk 13:1-9

Within a few days of 9/11 this passage came to mind. What would Jesus have said about 9/11. (We didn't start calling it 9/11 for a couple months at least.) Jesus would say, "Do you think that those who died on 9/11 Were bigger sinners than you are. I tell you they Were not. But unless you repent something worse than what happened to them will happen to you."

Some scriptures head line this passage as "Invitation to Repentance" The meaning of this is that when disaster falls God is inviting us to repent. It works like this. Something in my life goes terribly wrong. It makes me stop and think, "Why has this happened?" Then I might think, "Why has God allowed this to happen?" Hopefully I then think, "What do I need to repent of?" If you can say out loud, "What do I need to repent of," without something immediately coming to mind, God has written you off completely.

Don't think you will repent later. Repenting later is no repentance now at all. Furthermore God can not be mocked. If you put off repentance long enough you won't have it in you to repent. Thinking, "I'm not so bad." is not repentance By our standards most people are not so bad. Yet Jesus says most people are going to hell. We won't be judged by our standards. We will be judged by God's standard. God's standard is Jesus. If we are as good as Jesus we pass the test. Jesus never did anything wrong, in God's view. Perhaps you think or have thought, as I have, that you never did anything wrong. What you think

of as wrong does not matter. God is the judge. What He thinks is wrong is all that matters. I don't think you can refuse to repent for a lifetime and then repent as you see death approach.

Also you can die in an instant and find yourself before the throne of judgment without having repented. God can not be mocked. He can take you out at any instant, judge you and throw you into hell. Don't plan on repenting later. The safe thing to do is to repent now.

Blessed is the person that will take sin seriously and take repentance seriously without having to suffer some disaster. Blessed is the one who considers everyday what they have done. Who listens to the Holy Spirit saying what was wrong and repents right away.

56. Lead the way in Repentance. Read Lk 22:31-46.

I don't think I have ever heard a sermon on this verse or even heard it read in church. I think what Jesus is saying is this: "you, the twelve, must be tested. What was written about me must be fulfilled 'I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered', and besides this, you have been given much and will receive much more to come. It is just that you be tested. And many will learn by your example."

"you can't believe it but you will all run away. you Simon will deny that you even know me. I have prayed that your faith may not fail. I already know that it will fail in that you will deny me. I pray that you will have faith enough to know that you can repent and I will forgive you. you can begin again to do what is right."

"Because these things will happen to you to such an extreme, you will repent and understand faster than these others. I need you to help them as they deal with the fact that they all ran away, but that I love them, they can repent and come back to me. you will all have the opportunity again to stand for me at the risk of your lives, and for some more than once."

To us Jesus says, "Learn to repent of everything wrong big and small and help others to learn as well."

Jesus began His ministry with the word "Repent!" Let us repent everyday. Let us become experts in repentance. We can't do everything right. We will always sin from time to time. Hopefully we sin less and less and with regard to lesser and lesser things. But whenever we sin we can repent immediately and spend very little time cut off from God by our sin. We can have an almost uninterrupted loving, intimate relationship of following closely behind and beside Jesus.

57. Be reconciled to your brother. See Mt 5:23-26

Reconciliation is a part of repentance Repentance means I have done wrong. I know it. I turn away from those actions. I mean to never do them again. In the same situation I would do something different. I wish I could undo it. In some cases we can partially undo it. That is reconciliation and restitution.

These things really test our commitment to Jesus and His ways. It will cost us something great or small. It may cost us our pride to tell someone we were wrong. It may cost us our lives. Whatever it costs us if we will not pay it then these things are our God and not Jesus. What we refuse to give back will not save us at the ultimate trial.

At this point you may think "This is crazy!" That's OK. The wisdom of God is foolishness to men. And we are only men. God knows we think His requirements are crazy. At this point, start the process by not saying "I'm never going to do that." Instead say "Maybe someday I will be able to do that." Say "God is so great and powerful He could make me able to do this." He is too. And why would He not? Perhaps not today, as He tests you to see if you are really resolved to do His will not just for today. But if you are really resolved to do His entire will and do what you can today until you both know you are

committed to this. He will help you. Why would God not help someone to do what is right *IF THEY WANT TO DO EVERYTHING RIGHT?* He certainly desires right more than wrong. If you are resolved to do only some things right you may be on your own.

Don't think that attempts to be reconciled will be well received by your past victim. They do not owe you that. God does not owe you that. Don't think that God will bless everything else in your life because you did one difficult right thing. Don't have any preconceived notions at all of what it will be like or how it will work out. Do it because it is right. God does what He does because it is right.