

REPENTANCE

By: Ralph A. Crawford

Scripture: Matthew 3:1-2

“In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea; and saying,
Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 4:17

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say,
Repent: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

Additional Scripture References: Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; Luke 13:3

For about 41 years I pastored five churches in Oklahoma, and the last one I pastored for 25 ½ years. After retirement I began to serve Oklahoma churches as a supply preacher, Bible Study teacher, Evangelist, after dinner speaker and then in fourteen churches I was an Interim pastor for pastorless churches. In all I have been in 79 different churches. A lot of soul searching and prayer was necessary when trying to decide what to preach.

I checked out the first preachers in the New Testament, and of course, they were Jesus and John the Baptist. It very clearly states that they both came preaching the same subject, “Repentance.” My text for this sermon gives the two references to their preaching on repentance. Some people have told me that repentance is a one time duty, but I think we will see that repentance occurs many times in the span of our lives.

The scriptures indicate that “repentance” is essential. It is like “faith,” and it is like being “born again.” The scriptures tell us (Heb. 11:6) that **without faith**, it is impossible to please God, and you will remember Jesus told Nicodemus, (John 3:7) “ye **must** be born again.” And in Luke 13:3 Jesus said, “**Except** ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” So **repentance**, **faith**, and a **new birth** are identifying characteristics of God’s people. But repentance is the beginning requirement, and we will see that it is a **continuing experience** in the Christian’s life.

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoeo* (μετανοεω), and it means, “To change your mind.” In the army lingo it means “about face.” A hundred and eighty degree turn around. This change of mind means we are to stop what we have been believing, and agree with what God wants us to believe. Paul calls this **change of mind** a spiritual warfare strategy where we are attempting to “bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ ;”(2 Cor. 10:5).

Repentance is difficult for self-centered human beings. Especially those of us who pride ourselves on always being right. We humans are arrogantly conceded, and we show great contempt for the beliefs opposite to ours. Repentance is not normal for us. We do not readily admit that we are wrong.

I have had three experiences which illustrate the degree of difficulty that repentance brings to the human mind.

In my church in Oklahoma City I had a dear friend who had the sweet spirit of a dedicated believer, and gave evidence that he produced the “fruits of the spirit” in his life. But along with this, he was a “*Democrat*.” Not just an ordinary Democrat, he was a “died in the wool Democrat.” I jokingly

challenged him once that if Jesus were to run on the Republican ticket, that he wouldn't vote for Him. He looked me straight in the eye, and said without hesitation, "Jesus wouldn't run on the republican ticket." He was so set in his political philosophy he could not conceive of Jesus running for office as a Republican. His mind was like concrete. He felt he was absolutely right. He was just like *Saul* on his way to Damascus. No human logic or reason could have changed *Saul's* mind. He was committed with papers in his hand. Only the divine intervention of Jesus Christ can bring repentance to a hard set mind!

The next illustration involves a grocery shopping experience. My wife came to my workshop in the back yard asking that I go to the store for her immediately. I ask her why she didn't go herself, and she said, "Oh I can't, it would take her a long time to get ready." Well I had my work overalls on and they were covered with wood shavings and wood sanding dust. So I ask her if I should take time to get ready too? And she said, "Oh no, you can go just like you are." Well I took her list, and went to the store. I hurried, because I was right in the middle of a project, and I fretted because she would send me dirty, but wouldn't think of going herself without dressing up.

I came home, carried her groceries to the kitchen, and threw the shopping list in the trash barrel, and hurried back to my shop. In a very short time she came to the shop complaining that I had not picked up everything she had on the list. Well I swelled up with pride and said, "If it was written on the list I brought it home, and you'll find it on the kitchen cabinet." She said, "I had coffee on the list and you didn't get it." "Coffee wasn't on the list!" I said in no uncertain terms. "Yes it was." She insisted. "No it wasn't." I said, and I hurried back to the trash barrel to find the list.

I found the list and straightened it out so I could show her. And when I straightened it out I saw COFFEE in capital letters right in the middle of the other items. My heart became faint. I worried about what to do. Finding the list wasn't a good idea. The evidence was right there staring me in the face. I thought about not showing her the list. The facts did not support my position; I had to admit I was wrong. She was right. This was tough, and very embarrassing. I would have to admit I was wrong and she was right, and that is exactly what it means to repent. It destroys human pride.

The other experience was in my early years. I was about 8 or 9 years old. One day my mother told me not to leave the yard. I had some friends who were playing with me on the sidewalk in front of our house. Our neighbor Mrs. Wallace, who lived across the street, was out sweeping her sidewalk. She was a dear friend to me. She was with my mother on the day I was born, and she even suggested that I be named Ralph. So as I grew up Mrs. Wallace was special friend of mine. When I visited her she gave me milk and cookies to eat, and she let me go through her house looking at all her birds. She let me feed the birds. But on this day, my friends wanted to go over and visit with Mrs. Wallace, instead of playing with me on my side of the street. I couldn't leave my yard so I motioned for them to come back. When they came back, I told them to stay with me, and not to go over there where that "old woman" was. Well, wouldn't you know, they went right back over there and told her what I said.

Then Mrs. Wallace called me to come over because she wanted to talk to me. I didn't want to go. I knew already I had said a terrible thing. But I went over there, and as I walked across the street, it seemed that with every step I took I grew shorter and shorter. She asked me if I called her an "old woman?" I began to cry, and my tears made puddles of water on that clean swept sidewalk. I confessed that I had called her an "old woman." and that I was so sorry and ashamed, and I asked her to forgive me. This is an example of repentance accompanied with confession, sorry and contrite heart.

Repentance comes when a mind set in concrete has to change. Repentance comes when the facts prove you are dead wrong. And Repentance comes from a broken and contrite heart.

My most important experience of repentance came when I was eleven years old. My mother was in the habit of telling people that I was a good boy. She would do this in my presence and I took great comfort and joy in hearing her brag on me for the little things I did around the house. I fed the chickens, mowed the lawn, picked up trash in the yard, dried the dishes, and kept my room clean. I didn't have any better sense than to believe what my mother said. After all who was I to dispute her word? Hearing her say these things about me caused me to think I was just a little better than the average kid. Preachers preaching about being a sinner needing to be saved, didn't bother me at all. The invitation songs after the preacher's sermons were for sinners to come to the front and confess their sins, but it wasn't for me, "I was a good boy!, my Mom said so." For a long time I lived under the cover of my mother's exorbitant praise. Church didn't bring conviction to me like it did to some. Preaching and invitation hymns were for bad kids, because bad kids go to hell and good kids go to heaven, and I was a good kid. My theology was simple and to the point. I learned it all from my mother.

In February of 1936 we had a revival in the First Baptist Church in Nowata. We were coming down to the last week of the revival. On Wednesday night when we were getting ready to go to the service, my dad asked me when I was going to trust Jesus as my saviour. I was dumb founded. Me? Who is he talking to? Hasn't he been listening to all the things Mom has been saying about me? I'm a good boy! That Saviour business is for bad kids. I did not argue with him, thinking maybe that Mom heard what he ask and she would come to my defense. But she didn't! And he began to quote scripture to me. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. ...there is none that doeth good, no not one." Yow! All these scriptures were from the third chapter of Romans and they didn't sound like what Mom had been saying. I wondered if she was getting her teachings from maybe the Reader's Digest, because I knew Dad was getting his straight from the Bible.

I went to school on Thursday, and I was miserable. "Could I really be a sinner?" I questioned. It was hard to concentrate on anything except the question Dad asked me, "When are you going to trust Jesus as your Saviour?" We went to church again on Thursday and Friday nights. Conviction was coming hard and heavy. The invitation hymns were digging deeper and deeper into my heart. But I managed to fight off the strong invitation hymn called "Almost Persuaded."

We went back to the service on Saturday night the 22nd day of February, and I took my place in the Booster Band Choir. We sang, the preacher preached, and then the invitation Just As I Am was sung. My dad came down from the choir and whispered in my ear, "Ralph don't you want to trust Jesus as your saviour?" I told him, "Oh! I sure do, but how do I do it?" He said, "Go tell Brother Scott that you are a sinner and you want to trust Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins."

I have never had such a relieving, relaxing and comfortable experience. No one told me I was repenting, but I learned later that was exactly what I did. I had changed my mind. Where once I thought I was a good boy, I discovered that I was not good. The Bible was true, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."(Rom. 3:23) I agreed with God. I was a sinner in need of forgiveness. I didn't try to clean up my life. I came to Jesus just as I was.

Changing our minds and trusting Jesus brings us to the place where God adopts us into His family. We become His Children, but we are far from what He wants us to be. He wants us to grow in His goodness (grace) and He wants us to be rid of the sins that so easily over take us. He wants us to act like, talk like and look like His children. The Apostle Peter says we are to "grow in Grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). In fact Paul said that The Lord gave us some apostles, some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; "For the perfecting

of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11-13). So we have a lot of “repenting” to do to bring us up to the measure and fullness of Christ.

So take your place at that point in your life where you became a born again believer, a child of God. From that point you started growing more like Jesus. We were convicted to pray, that’s a step of growth. We have been convicted to read and study the Bible, that’s another step of growth. We have been convicted to change our hateful and belligerent attitude, that’s a BIG STEP of growth. We have learned that God wants us to be a cheerful giver of our time talents and money. That’s another BIG step in growth. It seems that every time we go to church and hear the preacher, God lays another truth on our hearts and we have to “change our minds” and start doing what He says. We just keep on, and on, and on “repenting.”

One day Beverly and I went to the mall and discovered a large group of whittlers, or wood carvers, (as some would call them), were having a convention in the main lobby. They were all sitting in a large circle. We came up behind one of the whittlers and asked what they were doing. This man said we are in a contest whittling out ducks from this small block of wood. I asked him if they were all using a pattern? He said no, that everyone was on their own as to what shape and kind of duck they would make. I asked, how can you do such a thing without a pattern? He said, “Well I don’t know, all I know is that I’m taking all the wood off this block that doesn’t look like a duck.” That is exactly what God is doing to His children. He is taking all the barnacles of carnality and sin off of us that doesn’t look like Jesus.

The Apostle Paul was accused by some of the people that he thought he was already perfect. But in Philippians 3:13-14 he corrected their thinking. He said:

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

He admitted that he was not perfect, but he was doing his best to reach the high mark of Jesus that has been set for our earthly growing time. He told the people in Rome that they were not to be “conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their mind so that they would know the good, acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12: 1-2). He also told the people in the church at Colosse that they were to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, (Col. 1:10).

As we grow in grace and the knowledge of Jesus, the more our words and life will direct people to truth of God’s Word. Some one has written:

The Gospel is written a chapter a day,
By the deeds that we do and the words that we say.
People read what we say, whether false or true,
Say! What is the Gospel according to you?

The Christian’s duty while living on this earth is to humbly show the world what a Christian looks and acts like. When I go with my wife to the mall we usually go into Penney’s, Dillard’s and Foley’s. All of these stores have mannequins standing about in the strategic places in the store dressed in their finest dresses and suits. They don’t say a word, they just stand there. But they are catching the eye of every

person who enters the store. What are they good for? They are telling everybody how good they would look if they were dressed in this outfit.

Do you remember the little song we sang about God working on us? It goes like this:

He's still working on me, to make me what I ought to be,
It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars, the Sun and earth, and Jupiter and Mars,
How lovingly patient He must be, For He's still working on me.

John Oakman in 1892 wrote a song that we have sung many times in church. It goes like this:

"I'm pressing on the upward way, new heights I'm gaining everyday,
Still praying as I onward bound, Lord plant my feet on higher Ground.
Chorus: Lord lift me up and let me stand, By faith on heaven's table land,
A higher plane than I have found; Lord plant my feet on higher ground.

And Charles H. Gabriel in 1934 published this hymn:

More like the Master I would ever be, more of His meekness, more humility,
More zeal to labor, more courage to be true, more consecration for work He bids me do,
Chorus: Take thou my life, I would be thine alone, Take thou my heart and make it all thine own,
Purge me from sin, O' Lord I now implore, Wash me and keep me, thine forever more.

Some one told me a few years ago that most of the members of Southern Baptist Churches have stopped growing in their spiritual lives. That means this year, they are no better than they were last year. They are not any closer to the Lord this year than last! And in all probability they are not *doing* any more for the Lord this year than they did last year. Did you know that a non-growing Christian has forgotten who he is and doesn't realize that the only reason why he is still alive is to represent the Lord here on earth. Paul said (Phil 1:21) "For to me to live is Christ. . ." Mrs. J.W. Baron was a state worker for juniors, and a Sunday school superintendent for some 40 years at Olivet Baptist Church. She got so old she couldn't climb the stairs to get to church. So at 94 years of age she spent the greater part of the day sitting in her porch swing. I visited her in these last days. She asked me one day, "Brother Crawford why is God letting me live, I can't do anything anymore?" I told her that God must have wanted to show the people on NW 16th Street how a 94 year old Christian woman lives out her final years."

"Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." (Matt. 4:17)