

# Repent

---

## **Repent!**

A sermon preached at Poplar Baptist Church in the morning service by Henry Dixon on 24th October 2004

"The time has come....The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1.15)

## **Introduction**

These words contain a summary of the Gospel, the Good News, that Jesus proclaimed as he started his ministry. Jesus announced to his hearers that the kingdom of God is near, it is about to start. He will soon die on the Cross, and then the rule of God in men's hearts will begin. People will be saved from the guilt of sin, and also delivered from its power. They will live a new life by the power of the Holy Spirit. And this new life that starts in men's hearts will never die. It is eternal life.

Jesus says that, in response to this, we must repent and believe the good news. But this raises an important question: what does it mean to repent? Coupled with this are two other important questions: why is it so important that we repent, and how can we know if we have repented?

It is important that you know the answers to these questions, so that you can check whether or not you are a true Christian, and so that, if you are not yet a Christian you can find out how to become one. If you are already a Christian, being better informed as to the answer to these questions should help you to be more fruitful as a Christian. It will also help you when

you have to show discernment towards others as to whether or not they are repentant.

## **1. What does it mean to repent?**

The word "repent" means literally to change your mind. You have previously thought one set of thoughts about God, about Jesus Christ, and about your way of life, but then God opens up your eyes to see that the way you have been thinking previously was wrong. You change your mind, and think differently. Before, if you believed in God at all, your thoughts towards him were hostile and irreverent. Now you see him as your loving heavenly Father who sent Christ into the world to die for your sins. Before you thought of Jesus, perhaps, as a great religious figure, or a prophet, but now you see him as the Lord, the Son of God, who died for your sins on the Cross. Before you thought that you were living a reasonably good life, not perfect, but not as bad as some. Now you realise that you are a sinner through and through, that you are morally bankrupt, and you deserve to go to hell. Before you thought that a few minor vices and sins did not really do any harm, now you realise that all sin, however "minor" is deeply offensive to God, and you hate the sin which once you used to tolerate and think was just a bit of "harmless fun".

So we see that there is a close link between repentance and faith. You cannot truly believe without repenting, and you cannot truly repent without believing. If there is real repentance the change in your mind must result in genuine heartfelt faith in Christ as your Saviour.

However, repentance should not be thought of as just a mental state or attitude. It is a change of mind, but it results in concrete changes in your behaviour. It is no good just saying that you think differently. If you really do have a true change of heart, you will live differently as well.

But someone might ask, if we must repent in order to be saved, and if repentance involves a change of life, does this mean we are saved by our works? Does not the Bible teach that we are saved from going to hell by faith, not by works? The answer to this question is, yes, we are saved only by the grace of God, through faith in what Jesus did on the Cross. We are not saved by works. But if we truly believe on Christ, we must of necessity repent of our sins. We cannot say we trust Jesus that he paid for our sins and yet carry on in sin as we used to. If you truly trust Christ as your Saviour, you will loathe the sins which necessitated his death on the Cross, and change the way you live. If you do not change the way you live, the only conclusion to draw is that you do not truly trust Christ as your Saviour.

## **2. Why is it so important to repent?**

I want now to deal with the second question: why is it so important to repent? The answer is that if you do not repent you will go to hell. The Bible is absolutely clear that you cannot go to heaven if you do not repent of your sins. This is clear from the verse quoted at the start of this sermon.

Jesus said that because kingdom of God is near, it is about to start. we must do something. We must repent and believe the good news, so that we can be subjects in this kingdom. The implication is clear: if you do not repent you cannot be part of the kingdom of God.

This is not the only place in the Bible where repentance is shown to be absolutely necessary for salvation. In many other places Jesus and his apostles taught that repentance is essential for salvation. Here is an example:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually

immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6.9 – 10).

What the apostle is saying is that those who do not repent, those who carry on in their sinful lives without changing will not inherit the kingdom of God. They will go to hell. This is also the message of the following quotation:

- 1 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5.19 – 21).

The message is further underlined by what the apostle says in another place:

- 1 For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person-- such a man is an idolater-- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. (Ephesians 5:5 – 6)

So you should be under no illusions. If you continue to live a life of habitual sin, without repentance, then you will not go to heaven. You must repent to be saved.

But not only is repentance essential for salvation, it is also essential to live a fruitful life as a believer. It is no good to repent once at the beginning of the Christian life, and then to leave sin unchecked in your life. There has to be an ongoing daily repentance from sin. Otherwise sin will grow up like an uncontrolled weed and bring ruin and disaster to your

Christian life. There are many places in Scripture which teach this. Here is just one example:

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2.19 – 22)

If we are going to be useful to God we must purify ourselves from wickedness. In other words we must repent. We must constantly be on the lookout for sin in our lives, and as soon as we become aware of it we must repent. Sin has a dynamic of its own. If we do not repent as soon as we become aware of it, it will grow and grow until it completely dominates our lives. Sometimes as Christians we can say to ourselves something like this: "I will repent of all my sins, except this one little sin. This will be my one private little pet sin." The problem is that that one "little" sin, if it is not rooted out of your life will grow and grow until the whole of your life is dominated and ruined by it. You must repent each day if you are going to be a fruitful Christian.

### **3. What are the signs that a person has repented?**

This leads us into our third question. What are the signs that a person has repented? Let me first of all mention some things which do not necessarily indicate repentance:

First of all, acknowledgement of sin does not necessarily indicate repentance. There are instances recorded in the Bible where people have made some sort of acknowledgement of sin, and yet their lives subsequently showed they were not repentant. Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, on a number of occasions made an acknowledgement of his sin of refusing to let the Israelites go out of Egypt. (See Exodus 9.17 and 10.16). He asked for forgiveness, and asked for prayer that the plagues might be removed. But as soon as the plagues were removed, he hardened his heart again and continued in his sin. He had simply made a superficial acknowledgement of his sin, but he had not truly repented. There was no shift in the direction of his life. Similarly, Saul, the first King of Israel on a number of occasions also acknowledged his sin but without real repentance (I Samuel 15.24, 30 and 26.21). Judas Iscariot also acknowledged his sin of betraying Christ, but he did not repent (Matthew 27.4). There should be a frank and a full acknowledgement of sin when we repent, but an acknowledgement of sin does not by itself necessarily indicate repentance.

Secondly, sorrow does not in itself indicate repentance. The Bible warns us that there can be such a thing as "worldly sorrow". This is a sorrow that regrets the harm done to oneself by one's sins, but does not really grieve over the offence caused to God. Someone with this sort of sorrow goes over the past and says to himself "if I only I had not done this or that thing". He is full of regrets, full of thoughts of what might have been, full of self-pity, but his sorrow is not the true sorrow the repentant sinner. Again, there will be sorrow where there is true repentance. But this sorrow is a godly sorrow, which is grieved because of offence caused to God and to others, and leads to a change in life (see 2 Corinthians 7.9 – 11). So we need to have discernment about the tears of others, and our own tears. We need to ask are these the tears of someone who

is genuinely repentant, or are they the tears of someone who feels sorry for himself.

Thirdly, religious fervour and excitement does not necessarily indicate repentance. Certainly, if there is true repentance sometimes it will show itself in great joy and thanksgiving because of the knowledge of God's forgiveness. However, some people cover up their lack of repentance by literally making a great song and dance about their supposed devotion to God. They pray loudly in meetings, and say loud "amens" and "hallelujahs". But this is an old trick. It is exactly what the Pharisees in Jesus' day did, and what people have done all the way back to Cain, the first man to be born by natural processes, who murdered his brother. Cain was a very religious man, who offered a lavish sacrifice, but he refused to repent of his sin. God is not impressed by loud protestations of devotion to himself, or lavish sacrifices, so much as obedience. God said to the disobedient King Saul through Samuel the prophet

"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." (1 Samuel 15.22)

So just because you are very "loud" in your expression of devotion to God this does not necessarily indicate that you are repentant.

What, then, is the genuine and unmistakable proof of repentance? The real proof of repentance is a change of life. There is a common saying "actions speak louder than words", and this is certainly true when it comes to repentance. Anyone can learn the right words to say to make it

sound like he is repentant, but only a work of the Holy Spirit produces a change in the way a person lives.

So the great proof of repentance is this: when a person repents his life is radically transformed. It starts in family relationships. The child who used to be disobedient to his parents becomes respectful and obedient. The father who used to mistreat his children now treats them in a loving and good way. The husband who was unloving and irresponsible towards his wife becomes loving and caring towards her. The wife who was argumentative and insubordinate towards her husband becomes meek and submissive. The person who was living with his girlfriend stops sleeping with her and either marries her or else ends the relationship. The practicing homosexual stops his perverted practices.

It then works its way out in wider relationships and actions. The person who was always falling out with others becomes peace-loving. The cheat becomes honest in his dealings. The lazybones becomes hard working. The drunkard becomes sober. The drug addict breaks his harmful habit. The person who constantly used to look at pornography now guards what he looks at. The thief stops stealing and starts giving money away. The violent man becomes gentle. The person with a filthy temper becomes self-controlled. The person who was always eating too much controls his intake of food. The person who was harming himself looks after his body. The person who was into witchcraft and spiritism renounces such activity. The bitter person who was bearing a grudge now forgives. The proud person becomes humble. The rude person becomes polite. The gossip starts to control his tongue and says only what is true and upbuilding. The mean miser becomes open hearted and generous. The selfish and unloving person becomes kind and considerate. The greedy person becomes content with what he has.



Alongside this change of life will be a different attitude towards oneself. The person who is truly repentant will have a broken spirit and a contrite heart. If he is challenged about his sin, instead of getting angry he will readily admit his wrongdoing, and thank the person for his concern and ask for prayer. This is because the Holy Spirit has already convicted him of his sin. He has already been “wounded” by the Word of God. Someone who is truly repentant will not cover up his wrongdoing, especially to his nearest friends and family, but will confess his wrong, even before being challenged. By contrast, the person who is not repentant, when challenged about his behaviour will “rear up” in anger, and make all sorts of counter accusations against the person who has challenged him, and will, in all probability, refuse further contact with the person who has identified his sin.

Coupled with this will be a sincere attempt to make restitution. A person who is truly repentant will go to those whom he has wronged and seek to make things right. The thief will seek to return what he has stolen. The person who has mistreated others will apologise and seek to repair the damage he has done.

We see all these marks of repentance illustrated in the story of Zachaeus. You may remember he was the short man who wanted to get a look at Jesus, so he climbed up the tree to try to catch a glimpse of him. Jesus stopped, and called up to him by name, and invited himself into his home. Zachaeus was a tax collector, and in those days tax collectors generally were greedy and dishonest people who used their power in a corrupt way to gain money to which they were not entitled. The onlookers were critical of Jesus for going to be the guest of a man who was a notorious sinner. But when Zachaeus took Jesus into his house, something happened. We do not know how it came about, or what Jesus said to him to make him change, but while Jesus was in his house Zachaeus

said to him, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything I will pay back four times the amount." (Luke 19.8). He was a changed man. He stopped cheating. He gave away a large portion of his money. He also made steps to put things right with those he had wronged. He offered to pay back four times what he owed to those he had cheated.

## **A challenge**

Let me now make this personal. How about you? Have you ever repented of your sins? Does your life show forth the fruit of repentance, or is it really, if truth be told, no different from the life of a reasonably morally minded non-Christian? Do you have a broken heart for your sin, or have you never known the Holy Spirit's convicting power? Do you have real godly sorrow for sin that leads to repentance, or such sorrow as you have for your sin merely a worldly sorrow? How do you react when someone points out your sin? Do you thank the person, or do you get angry and go off in a huff? It may be that this sermon might reveal to you that you have never truly repented of your sins. You may have been baptised, you may be accepted by others as an "upstanding member of society", a member of the church and a "good person" but you know inside that you are not really converted, you have never really turned from your sin. What should you do? Turn now! Repent of your wrong doing. Make clean breast of things. Confess your sin to God, and where necessary to others, receive forgiveness, and start to live in a new way by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It may be that you would honestly answer to the challenge I have just made, yes, I really do believe I am a Christian. There was a time some years ago when I repented of my sin, and I received Christ as my personal Saviour. There is no doubt in my mind that my life has changed. If that is the case, thank God! But let me ask you something else: Are you repentant

today? Is there some sin in your life that God has been bringing to your attention, perhaps through your conscience, perhaps through reading the Bible, perhaps through contact with other Christians, or through reading sermons like this? Have you been refusing the voice of your conscience? Are you saying inside "I am not going to yield on this one. I have obeyed God in many areas of my life, but this area I reserve for myself. I am going to do things my way in this area". I must warn you that if you do that disaster will come upon your Christian life. That one sin, even if at the moment it is a "small" sin, if it is not repented of, will grow and grow until it is completely out of control and ultimately it will ruin your entire Christian life. Sin never lets up. If you do not kill it, it will kill you. Christian, if you are aware of a sin in your life of which you have not repented, repent now, before disaster comes upon you.

Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission, International Bible Society.

This typed up sermon is copyright © Henry Dixon 2008, Poplar Baptist Church, 2 Zetland Street, London E14 6RB, United Kingdom. It may be reproduced without permission, provided:

- 1 It is reproduced in full,
- 2 The author is stated and this copyright notice is reproduced exactly
- 3 No charge is made for copies.

All other reproduction can only be with permission of the copyright holder.