

Unrepentant to the End

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Well, thank you for being with us again this evening as we open God's word as we love to do every Sunday and every Tuesday. Scripture says and makes a charge on those who would be ministers of God's word in 2 Timothy 4:1,

1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Now, one of the things when you study Scripture, you realize that the very first lies that Satan tempted the human race with was to question the judgment of God. You remember in Genesis 3 how Eve said, "If we eat the fruit or touch the tree, we'll die," and Satan said, "You surely will not die," in direct contradiction, a blatant contradiction of what God had said to Eve and had warned her about. So Satan does not mind at all directly contradicting the word of God and one of the things that we're mindful of is that one of his primary targets to lull people to sleep is to diminish the sense of the coming judgment of God and the serious nature of what that will be like, and it makes it all the more urgent as we preach the word in season and out of season, that we give weight and that we give voice to what Scripture says about the coming nature of the judgment of God. We need to deal with these things earnestly and seriously as a church body and as we deal with others. You know, it's just so common for people to say, "But I don't want to hear that. I want to hear about grace," to which I say, "But we need to teach the full counsel of God. We need to know what the Bible says about everything and Scripture speaks to this in no uncertain terms."

So what we've been doing on Sunday mornings for those of you that are visiting, perhaps over the live stream, we've been finishing up Matthew 7 where Jesus speaks about the nature of false teaching and coming judgment, and here for a couple of three weeks on Tuesday, we've been doing a parallel study on repentance that is related to that, to kind of blend those things together. As we start tonight, if you would open to Matthew 7:21 to just kind of set the stage here, Matthew 7:21, we see our Lord saying,

21 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.
22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."'

It's a text of warning and when you preach a text of warning, there needs to be a tone, a demeanor of warning that is involved in it as well. It would be completely inappropriate, as you all could see, to teach a passage like that in a lighthearted manner in a message that was filled with jokes and with personal stories and things like that, because the tone of the message would undercut the truth that the passage is speaking to. So we're mindful that as we try to properly interpret God's word, that we also want to communicate it in a tone that is consistent with the message that the particular text is giving. This is a text of warning and there are warnings that we need to take to mind, and that's what we want to do here tonight in a message that I've titled "Unrepentant to the End." Unrepentant to the end is the title of tonight's message for those of you that are taking notes, and as I like to say sometimes, even if you're not taking notes, it's still the title of the message.

So, two weeks ago when we opened this on Tuesday night, we did a study called "Surprisingly Far From Repentance," and looked at some scriptural examples of people that would seem to be so close to being on the verge of repentance and yet they weren't. They were actually very far from it, and we saw a couple of principles that I want to review just because it has been two weeks. We saw that, first of all, the feeling of regret or the feeling of remorse by itself is not repentance. Regret alone is not repentance. Being sorry for sin is not repentance if that is just standing alone. We illustrated that from the life of Judas Iscariot. He felt regret, so much so that he gave back the silver that they had given him to betray Christ into their hands, but then he went out and hanged himself. This was not repentance unto life, this was a sorrow and a regret that led him to suicide. That's not repentance, repentance is something else. Stephen's preaching we saw in Acts 7, pierced the hearts of the Jews but they also turned to death in response only they didn't kill themselves, they killed Stephen. So regret alone is not repentance. Conviction alone is not repentance.

The other thing, secondly, that we saw, is that miracles do not produce repentance, and we saw evidence of these things in the teaching of our Lord. Abraham told the rich man in Hades that if people will not hear Moses and the prophets, it wouldn't matter if you sent to them a man risen from the dead. Something so supernatural known to men, a man from the dead come back to preach to them would not avail them, would not drive them to repentance if they were not willing to hear the word of God. And here's what I want you to see as we're contemplating this and we're starting to think through the implications of the Gospel and we're thinking through the implications of what Scripture says about the hardness and the deadness of the hearts of men: the refusal of men to repent even when they are under conviction and even when they are showing remorse and feel remorse, it shows how desperately hardhearted the human race is.

Now, with that said, let's just step back for a moment and answer the question: what is repentance? And Question 87 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism answers the question, "What is repentance unto life?" as follows. This is the real deal here in terms of what true repentance is and it answers the question in this way. It says, "Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, with grief and hatred of his sin, turns from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience." That's a mouthful, isn't it? Let me say it again, "Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, with grief and hatred of his sin, turns from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience."

Repentance is a full turning away from sin with a purpose to pursue obedience to God and it takes place in the context of the sinner understanding that mercy is offered to him in the Lord Jesus Christ. So he has a sense of sin, he has a sense of an offer of mercy in Christ, and he turns away from sin with the purpose to pursue obedience to Christ in his life. And this is a gift of God. It is not a work of man, it is a gift of God, as we'll see at the end of tonight's message. But there is a sense of sin, there is a sense of mercy offered in Christ, and with sorrow over sin, you turn from sin and pursue new obedience, a whole new way of life understanding that there is a new pursuit in your life at the heart.

Well, this is what real repentance is and here's what we want to see for tonight. We're going to consider a couple more negative examples of things and then when we gather together in two weeks after that other guy preaches next Tuesday, we'll finish this series on repentance and move on to other things. But I've had these things in my mind for a number of years, I've never had the opportunity to express them before this evening, some things that are really striking and even startling about the nature of repentance that I want you to see from God's word, and also that may challenge your own thinking about the nature of the human heart and the way the human heart responds to extreme circumstances in life.

It is a common mistake, a common misunderstanding, to think that as people draw closer to calamity, that their hearts will be softened and be more likely to turn to God in repentance, and Scripture shows us that that is not necessarily the case. So we need as we see these things, we're going to see two things become clear and rise, as it were, from the ashes in our mind. 1. How desperately dead the human heart is toward the things of God; and secondly, how desperately we need the grace of God above all things to be at work if anybody is going to be saved. Jesus said there will be many on that last day who are sent away, and he had said earlier, as you know because we've been emphasizing this so very much, the gate is narrow, the way is narrow that leads to life. So we want to see this illustrated for us and to kind of come to grips with it individually, come to grips with this as a church, so that we would see how utterly reliant we are upon God to do a supernatural work rather than trusting in any human conditions or anything about man to turn to God on his own.

So what we want to do, we'll continue the numbering from last time, our third point in this series. Number one was regret alone is not repentance. Secondly, miracles do not

produce repentance. And thirdly, and this one is weighty, thirdly we want to see that the deathbed, the deathbed does not produce repentance. Certainly you could say the deathbed does not necessarily produce repentance, and I want you to think with me about this. We often talk about the thief on the cross and people often look to the thief on the cross as being a message of hope about being able to be saved even in extremity, and that's very good and it is right that we should do that.

If you would, look at Luke 23 with me, beginning in verse 39. We just need to think these things all the way through to the end. We need to work through it completely and not simply cherry pick the things that we like and ignore other truth that is evident right in the same passage. So in Luke 23:39 through 43, we see this,

39 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at [Christ], saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" 40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Now, with this thief who turns to Christ and asks him to remember him, you see everything, you see all of the elements of true repentance. You see him acknowledging his own sin, "We are suffering justly." You see him turning to Christ, apprehending the mercy of Christ, and having nothing other than the written placard above the head of Christ, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," and he says, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!" So in the simplicity of his repentance and in the simplicity of these words, he abandons the world, he turns to Christ confessing his sin and asks for mercy, and our Lord graciously and lovingly and eagerly granted it to him, said, "Today you will be with me in Paradise."

That is one of the great evangelical texts in all of Scripture about the unconditional mercy of God toward repentant sinners. This man was not baptized. Baptism is not essential, it is not necessary for salvation. This man had no opportunity to be baptized but you see his faith and his understanding of Christ demonstrated in what he said and Jesus' response shows the great mercy he had even as he was hanging on the cross. It's amazing. An amazing statement of who our Lord is and how full of mercy and self-emptying he was to look on this repentant thief with a sense of mercy and to assure him of eternal life even as Christ himself was suffering greatly. What a wonderful wonderful Lord he is.

And we remember that and we know that story well, but beloved, for tonight, I want to remind you of something that we less often call to mind. There were two thieves. There were two thieves, one on either side of Jesus, and one of them did not repent even though he was facing death. In his dying breath, he rebuked Christ. Can you imagine? Can you imagine? He's on the verge of dying and he rebukes the only one who could save him from his dilemma, the only one who could save him from his sin. And he rebuked Christ

with his dying breath and said, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us." He mocks him. He challenges him. He rejects him even as he is hanging, as it were, I'm mixing metaphors here, hanging on his deathbed.

In Matthew 27:44, it says,

44 The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

And so when you put the passages together, you get the picture that early on in the process both thieves were looking at Christ and insulting him but in the course as the hours went by, the one thief looks at Christ and turns to him in repentance as God graciously worked in his heart to save him at the last hour. And we look at that and we say there's hope for sinners even on their deathbed and I agree with that and I affirm that, but beloved, if we're going to handle God's word carefully and think rightly about these issues, there is an encouragement and there is also a great caution at the same time because they both did not get saved. They both did not turn to Christ, or better stated, they did not both turn to Christ, one of them did not, and what I want you to see in this is that a sinner can know that death is just ahead of him, a sinner can have Christ presented to him clearly, no one had Christ more clearly present before him than that other thief on the cross, and in hardness of heart, he mocked Christ, he insulted him, he refused to repent and he entered into perdition with Christ just on the other side of his view.

Beloved, history is littered with men who were in sorrow, agony and fear on their deathbeds, and yet they did not call on Christ for their salvation. Few things if any in the catalog of principles that we could talk about, show the hardhearted hatred of men toward God than that; that they would hate God all the way into death and reject the one who could save them. And here's what I want you to see for this evening. It is sobering. These are not easy things for us to contemplate, but what I want you to see and to have in mind is this: is that life's greatest extremity is no guarantee of repentance. There is no guarantee that a man or woman will become softer toward the things of God as death starts to come upon them.

I want to just kind of expand on this with a quote from J. C. Ryle. J. C. Ryle said this and I quote, he said, "Repentance," it's kind of a lengthy quote so stay with me here. "Repentance and faith are the gifts of God and are not in a man's own power. If anyone flatters himself that he can repent at his own time and like the penitent thief be saved at the very last, he may find at length he is greatly deceived." Continuing the quote, "There is an immense amount of delusion in the world on this subject. I see many allowing life to slip away all unprepared to die. I see many allowing that they ought to repent but always putting off their own repentance, and I believe the one grand reason is that most men suppose they can turn to God just when they like. They talk of the thief that went to Paradise and was saved and they forget the one who died as he lived and was lost."

Another writer says this from 300 years ago, he says, "Most ungrateful and foolish is the conduct of those who take encouragement from the penitent thief to put off repentance to

a dying moment. They pervert the grace of their Redeemer into an occasion of renewing their provocations against him. They are most foolish to imagine that what our Lord did in so singular circumstances is to be drawn into an ordinary precedent." What he's saying is this: people foolishly look to the penitent thief and say, "I can be saved on my deathbed as well, and so I can put off the Gospel, I can put off the claims of Christ on my life, and I'll just repent at the end and all will be well with me and I'll enjoy sin all the way up to the end, call out to Christ at the last moment, and everything will be well."

This is an utter delusion of the greatest and most perverted kind of sort, for people to think in such terms, and let's just think through it a little bit here. What makes anyone think that if they are unwilling to turn to Christ now, that pursuing sin will somehow soften their heart to him later in life? Those of you that are not in Christ right now, I ask you, on what grounds do you think that being hard to Christ now and rejecting him when he is presented to you in mercy is going to make you more likely to receive him in the end? Your trajectory of life is what you should assume is going to be the outcome. You should not presume on grace at the end when you reject it when you are in sound mind and sound body and it is presented to you clearly and with mercy and with pleadings from God's word in the end. There is no reason to think that your heart will get softer the more you harden yourself in sin. That's foolishness. That's an entirely wrong way to think. It is a trivialization of the Gospel.

And also I would say this, it's a foolish assumption for any one of us to make to think that we're actually going to have time to contemplate eternal matters before we die. People die suddenly and unexpectedly all the time. They die in their sleep. They die in an accident. They die of a stroke. There is no justification for even assuming that you'll have time to consider it in the end. There is no justification to think that your heart will be willing in the end.

Beloved, having been alongside many people in their deathbeds, there is no reason to think that you're even going to have the presence of mind to think about spiritual things in the end. When death is wracking and breath is hard to come by and you have that rattle in your throat, there is no reason to think that you're going to be able to call out to Christ then. This is a grand delusion. This is a satanic deception to lull people into sleep thinking that the end of life will bring them to a spiritual sensitivity that they don't have and they're not even interested in now.

The deathbed cannot be counted on to produce repentance. Scripture says that today is the day of salvation. If you know that you are lost and you hear the claims of Christ, today is the day for you to act upon that because you have no guarantee of tomorrow, and even if you have tomorrow, there is no reason to think that your heart is going to be any more tender than it is now. You just might as well, look, you might as well, speaking to sinners here, speaking as though speaking to sinners, you know what I mean, you might as well, if you were going to think rightly about these things, you should assume that if you push Christ away today, that you're going to push him away even more eagerly tomorrow because your heart is being conditioned, and just like sun is baking soft clay into something hard and immovable, no longer pliable, that's what rejection of the Gospel

does to the human heart. The more you reject it, the more you should understand that you're making it more difficult to repent in the future.

Now, I realize I'm with brothers and sisters in Christ predominantly here. I understand or I hope that you understand the spirit in which I'm speaking and saying these things. I'm not accusing everyone in here of not being a Christian. That's the furthest thing from my mind. We're talking about Gospel principles here.

So as you have opportunity to share the Gospel, people say, "I'll consider it later," you point them to the other thief on the cross. You warn them. You help them understand that they are assuming things that there is no reason to think are going to be true in the end. It's just so very concerning to me, it's weighty to me, I lose sleep over these kinds of things, to see how lightly people tread upon the Gospel, how lightly they treat it.

Beloved, I want you to see something about your Lord, speaking now to you Christians, I want you to see something about your Lord in this context. When he was speaking in Matthew 7, he warned everyone about this. Christ warned about the outcome. This is not a surprise. There will be no one who can say, "I wasn't told. I didn't know." Christ warned about it and people don't even care enough to open the word of God to read what he had to say. They prefer a Christ of their own making and a Gospel that tends to their own preferences and the way they want it to be, rather than to hear what Christ said it actually is, to believe him, to respect his authority, to defer to him and to believe and submit. Well, look, the outcome of that mindset toward spiritual things and toward Scripture is eternal death. These things matter, don't they?

So given whatever platform the Lord gives us and whatever breath the Lord gives us, we try to speak and we try to warn of these things, that people would not foolishly gamble with eternity for the sake of a few more days of sin and fleshly intoxication. So the deathbed does not produce repentance in and of itself. It takes a work of God.

Now, fourthly, we see something else and this just gets even more striking. Fourthly, we see that judgment does not produce repentance. Judgment does not produce repentance. You know, Ecclesiastes says that insanity is in the hearts of men. Insanity is in the hearts of men and few things will illustrate that truth more than what we are about to see. Men who love their sin, men who hate God, have as the ruling principle of their being utter spiritual insanity, things that are against their own self-interest. They hate God so much, when push comes to shove and when it's really brought out, they hate God so much that they prefer their own destruction to repentance. That is how wicked and desperately sick the human heart is and we're going to see that as we look to the book of Revelation 9 and chapter 16.

Turn to Revelation 9 with me, if you will. In this look at future judgment, we read in verse 13, Revelation 9:13,

13 ... the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 one saying to the sixth angel who

had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. 17 And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.

Now look what's happening in the judgment that is being poured out at mankind at that time. Verse 18,

18 A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.

So get the picture here: a third of humanity is perishing in the midst of supernatural judgment coming from the angel of God, fire and smoke and brimstone, and there are these unthinkable, unimaginable destructions going on all around, and what's the response of those who are left and are still living? Surely they turned to God, didn't they, in light of the display of his power, in light of the display of judgment, in light of the evident visible consequences of sin and judgment right in front of their faces as a third of their fellow mankind perishes, in the light of things that have never been seen before? Surely they turned to God in repentance and cried out and said, "God, have mercy on me, the sinner!" Right? Surely that's what they did. Not quite. Verse 20,

20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.

They clung to sin in the face of judgment. They refused to repent even when supernatural judgment was raining down upon their heads. Even as they saw men falling to their left and to their right, they refused to repent. God's judgment standing alone did not produce repentance in them and we see the insanity in their hearts. Where do they think this is going? Are they going to successfully resist the judgment and overcome the one that has killed 33% of humanity all around them? Do they think that it's going to come out better for them if they are harder in heart? This, beloved, is utter insanity. This is what the unsaved human heart, this is the natural outcome of its rebellion against God. There is no inclination toward repentance anywhere in the unregenerate heart and you see that laid out plainly when it is subjected to judgment.

Later on in the Apocalypse we see a similar result. Look at Revelation 16:8.

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire.

How did they respond?

9 Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory. 10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain,

And what did they do?

11 and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

You know, I have a family member in mind with what I'm about to say who has had a very very sad and miserable life. I won't go into the details because the details don't matter. But we are tempted to think in our worldly thinking, in the unsanctified portion of our mind, we are tempted to think that difficult physical trials will soften the hearts of the lost, and sometimes you'll hear people say, "Well, you know, I'm just praying that God will bring something into his life and make it hard on him and maybe that will soften him up." That's not a good way to think. That is simply not true.

Another writer said this, writing back in the mid-twentieth century, he said and I quote, "Physical pain and anguish may produce blasphemy but not repentance. A man might bitterly rue the sin that brought the wrath of a vindictive God down upon his head, and at the same time blaspheme against the God who inflicts the suffering." That's what we see going on in Revelation. They feel the weight, the full weight of suffering, they feel the weight of judgment and their response is not repentance, it's blasphemy, and that gives us a sense of the difficulty of these things.

So as we are moving about amongst the lost, as we are thinking rightly about the nature of the Gospel, we should not hope that outward circumstances, even of the most adverse kind, will produce repentance in the heart of those who are suffering. That is not the source of repentance. External circumstances, external affliction, is not the source of repentance. It's not where it comes from. And external circumstances and external trials, and I would venture to say that most of you, if not all of you, have seen this illustrated in the lives of people you know, perhaps in the lives of people that you love, to see that affliction did not soften their heart but made them even more hard and more bitter and more resistant to any kind of talk about the Gospel or of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why is that? Why is that? Do you see, beloved, do you understand that what that is manifesting is how much the human heart loves self, loves sin, and hates and resists God?

Rather than turning to God in affliction, they are showing that they will not have God, they will not have God even at the great cost of their present suffering. They just hate him for the affliction rather than turning to him in repentance for relief not only from the anguish of affliction but for salvation from sin. That is how hard the human heart is and what it shows us, as we kind of work this all the way through theologically, you might say, what it shows us is the utter impossibility, the utter impossibility of humans producing repentance. I can't produce repentance in the human heart. You can't make someone repent. If God's judgment won't make someone repent, you and I don't have the power to do it either. You see, repentance that truly leads to salvation comes from another source. It comes from something else. It comes not from external circumstances but from the work of God within. It's something that God has to grant to a man, has to grant to a woman, and if God does not grant it, nothing else will. Nothing else can produce it.

Turn over to the book of Acts 11, if you would. You may recall that Peter is giving a report of his ministry to the Jews and we'll pick up the story in verse 15 as he's talking about how his preaching had resulted in the conversion of Gentiles. He said in verse 15 of Acts 11,

15 "... as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. 16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' 17 Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" 18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life."

We've pointed out many times over the years that salvation is of the Lord. Salvation belongs to the Lord. It is his gift. It is his power. He is the one who must produce it in the heart. Men are commanded to repent and believe but God must do a work in their heart for that to take place, and if God does not do it, no man anywhere under the sky of heaven will be inclined to do it on his own. There takes a work of God to draw a man out of sin and to draw him to Christ. Christ said in John 6, "No one can come to the Father unless He draws him."

In Acts 16:14 in the story of Lydia, you can turn to Acts 16:14,

14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

The Lord opened her heart and she responded to the things that were being spoken by Paul.

In John 1:11 and 12, we read this, and verse 13,

11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.
12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

What was the source of the power for them to believe? Verse 13, he goes on and expands,

13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man,

The will of man cannot produce this result on its own,

but of God.

Finally one last passage in 2 Timothy 2. I'll just read it. You don't need to turn there. 2 Timothy 2, beginning in verse 24 says,

24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,

God opened Lydia's heart. God granting repentance. The will of God leading people to believe in the name of Christ. God granting repentance to the Gentiles. First of all, as we look at that, we realize, let's start with ourselves if we are in Christ, do you realize how utterly humbling this is to us if we are in Christ? It was not my superior wisdom, my superior insight compared to another man that has me now in Christ compared to someone who is not. God had mercy on my sin-sick rebellious soul and opened up my heart to believe the things that I had heard about the Gospel to turn to Christ. God gave me a gift that I did not deserve, that I would not have sought on my own when I repented all those years ago. The same is true of you, beloved. If you are in Christ, God has had mercy on you and you should glorify him. You should have gratitude in your heart toward him for that, but the last thing that should be in your mind is any kind of sense of superiority compared to someone who did not. You are simply on the receiving end of mercy you did not deserve and that humbles us. That does not, as is so often falsely charged against Calvinism, that does not lead us to a sense of pride, it leads us to an utter sense of humility. Grace was given to me that I wasn't looking for, that I did not deserve, that I had spat at in the past, and yet, as it were, the Lord looked at me and said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." A mercy given to one that was not given to the other.

Secondly, beloved, I would want to encourage you as you're sharing with family, as you're sharing with others in the workplace, in your neighborhood, and people just won't listen, beloved, do you see where the problem is? The problem is in their dead and cold and stony heart and you cannot make them repent. If God's judgment won't produce repentance, what are our pipsqueak words going to do unless the Spirit of God helps and does a work in their heart to open their heart like it did Lydia?

Where does this leave us? If we are in Christ, it leaves us with a sense of profound humble gratitude. "God, thank you for saving me." When it comes to evangelism, when it comes to sharing Christ, how do we help people? We point them to the word of God. We abandon the thought that there is some magic argument that I can use that will automatically produce repentance. That's not true. There is no such argument. Beloved, if there was such an argument that by the sheer force of human reason would force someone to repent, we could convert the entire world. All we would have to do is go out and make the argument. But it's not like that and so what we do is we point them to the word of God where the power resides, we point them to Christ crucified, Christ risen for sinners, we point them to the Christ who freely offers himself in mercy, and we bid them to come, and as we do that, we ask God to help us by the work of his Holy Spirit to do that work in their heart which is beyond our power to do. We are dependent as we share Christ. I am dependent as I preach the word of God. I can't persuade anybody by the sheer force of my eloquence or lack thereof.

We need the Holy Spirit to help us supernaturally because if a heart won't repent when a man comes back from the dead, if a heart won't repent in the presence of miracles, if a heart won't repent even when it's feeling remorse over its own sin, a heart won't repent on the deathbed, a heart won't repent in face of the judgment of God, do you realize how weak and helpless we are unless the Spirit of God comes down? It helps you understand why one of my favorite hymns is, "Brethren, we have met to worship," because there is a line in there that says, "All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down."

That's how dead and hard the human heart is. That's how great the power of God is. That anyone at all is converted shows the power of God over the human heart and we ask him to do his work as we minister his word in private and in public, and when people are converted, when we are converted, he gets all the praise. He gets all the glory.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we need a word-centered, Christ-centered supernatural act by you to bring about repentance in the human heart. We desire to see that on display. We thank you that you have done such a work in so many of our hearts. And Father, we look back at our own life before Christ and we see how hard and dead we were, some of us mocking the Gospel, some of us heartily rejecting it, and yet there came that point in time where your Spirit was unleashed on our heart and a change of perspective was brought about and we did turn to Christ for mercy. So Father, we know that you do this. We know that you are capable of it, even though we are not.

So Father, we ask you and we make this assumption, Father, that you have not exhausted your mercy; that you are not finished with grace. And as we think of loved ones that do not know you, as faces and names come to our mind, Father, that are still outside of Christ, and we have pled with them, and we have asked them, and we have invited them, and we have sought them, and they have refused every effort to hear anything of Christ,

Father, we ask you to extend your grace further and do for them the same work in their hearts that you did in ours.

Dear God, help us to proclaim Christ and him crucified, and may you be pleased as we preach a crucified Christ, to produce repentance in the hearts of many who hear. Father, we take no delight in the thought of judgment coming on any that we know. We have no satisfaction in that at all. We would ask instead to see mercy displayed, Father, believing that greater glory would come to your name through mercy being shown to these previously dead hearts than for them to perish and enter into eternal judgment. But Father, we are helpless. We can't produce this on our own and so we ask you by your mercy and by your grace to work through our evangelism, to work through our preaching, to work through the ministry of Truth Community Church to produce supernatural fruit, that is, the birth of new life being shown in the hearts of sinners who previously rejected you.

Father, we say it humbly, we say it dependently, Lord, we accept nothing less than that from your hand. We know that you can. We ask you to do that for which Christ came in the first place and to let us see the fruit of it now and echoing throughout all of eternity. And Lord, for those that are here with us either over the live stream or in this room, Father, who have heard this a thousand times and more, Father, may this be the occasion where your tender mercy is displayed and their hearts are opened and they come to this merciful Christ who delights in saving sinners. These things we ask and pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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