

Isaiah 1:1 Repentance 3-19-17

### Isaiah 1:18-20

**<sup>18</sup> "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool. <sup>19</sup> If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land; <sup>20</sup> But if you refuse and rebel, You shall be devoured by the sword"; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.**

Isaiah is an interesting book. From beginning to end it tells the people of Judah that they need to repent. But from beginning to end it never uses the word "repent". Jeremiah does. But Isaiah does not.

As I was thinking about that, and studying I came across a sermon on the internet that discussed repentance in ways that were very challenging to me. I am afraid that I have not been very accurate with the word "repent" in my preaching. And I thought that now is as good a time as any to fix that.

Our text in Isaiah is very interesting in how it lays out repentance. I am not going to exhaust the text this morning. I actually chose it only for its emphasis of repentance. Look what it says.

First, in verse 18 God appeals to the listeners by saying, **Come now and let us reason together.**

The word for reason means to argue, to convince, to convict, to judge, to reprove. The word usually refers to the clarification of people's moral standing, which may involve arguments being made for them or against them.

Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.

So God is going to reason with humans. He is going to appeal **to their minds** in order to **initiate a needed change**. That is how God normally works with people. He gives them content for their minds that is accompanied with the Holy Spirit's enlightening. And in the instance this morning, it is the first step in repentance. Then God holds out His forgiveness as being of greatest importance. He is talking about sin. He holds that out as being **the great problem**. And God is offering the amazing solution. He is offering **forgiveness of sins**.

Now look at how God defines the options available to humans.

Either

A. Willing and Obedient

Or

B. Refuse and Rebel

Let's look at these.

**Willing and Obedient**

**Willing**- A verb meaning to be willing, to consent, to be acquiescent, to yield, to desire. Its primary meaning is to be positively inclined to respond to some authority or petition.

Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.

**Obedient**- A verb meaning to hear, to obey, to listen, to be heard of, to be regarded, to cause to hear, to proclaim, to sound aloud. The verb basically means to hear and in context expresses various connotations of this. (An example of its use is in Isa 1:2- the heavens are commanded to "Hear, Oh heavens!" to the prophet's message about Israel)

Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.

So the proper response to **God's reasoning with man**, God's **offer of forgiveness** of sin is for the man to have an **attitude of yielding to this God**. The man must be prepared to bow to this superior. Along with that must exist both **the hearing and willingness** to obey what this God has to say. A man must hear what God says and be willing to do it.

Now, what is the evil alternative? What is the opposite of being willing and obedient?

Refuse and Rebel

**Refuse**- The basic idea of this word is a refusal or rejection of an offer.

Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.

Remember the offer Christ made to the rich young ruler. He told the man to first go and sell all he had, and then return and follow Christ. The rich man rejected that offer. He didn't want to follow Christ at that price.

**Rebel** - A verb meaning to be rebellious. In one instance, this word spoke of a son's rebellion against his parents ([Deut. 21:18, 20](#)). In all other instances, this word was used of rebellion against God, which provoked Him to action.

Complete Word Study Dictionary, The - The Complete Word Study Dictionary – Old Testament.

Rebellion is more than a falling into sin or making a mistake. Rebellion is the decision to do what one wants to do fully knowing **that God says no**, or refusing to do that which God says **we must do**. It is an attitude of continued refusal to submit to God's authority.

So when God was calling these people to repentance, He was calling them to a willingness to submit themselves to God and be obedient to what He says, which is contrary to what **they have been doing** and it is **the opposite of refusing that offer and intentionally doing some alternative**. Repentance is a change of mind

due to God's reasoning with man that results in a change of attitude that happens directly resulting from that change of mind.

Now let's look at the words for repentance. Remember that one of the last things that Christ told His disciples was that the repentance and remission of sins should be preached.

**Luke 24<sup>46</sup> Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day,<sup>47</sup> and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.**

The word for **repentance** is metanoia (meh tawn oy yah)

a change of mind: as it appears in one who repents of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done

that change of mind by which we turn from, desist from

Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.

Christ said that this message of repentance had to be preached to all nations. So this **message of repentance and remission** is a **synonym** of the **message of the Gospel**. Certainly this cannot be a second message. This is **the** gospel. Now, are there other ways to describe this Gospel? Yes. The New Testament is chock full of them. A more important question is, can the gospel be presented without using the word "repent"?

Well, Jesus Himself did such a thing in John 3. When Christ was presenting the gospel to Nicodemus, Christ never used the word repentance. What word did Christ use?

**John 3:16**

**<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

Jesus here is presenting a message of **belief**. What do we do with that? Was Christ **not preaching the gospel properly**? Was He avoiding the messy topic of the problem of our sinful condition? No, not at all. Look what Christ says later in the same text.

**John 3:19-21**

**<sup>19</sup> And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."**

Christ is not avoiding the fact that people need to do business with their sinful hearts. He even says that the only way that people will **live in the light** is if they are doing good deeds in God, they have changed their ways. So it isn't like Christ is preaching an easy-believism gospel where all that needs to happen is you pray a

prayer and sign a card. Christ describes **a life change** in the one **who truly believes**. This life change is so big that the deeds this person is doing are evaluated as deeds that were done due to the power of God in his or her life. Those who have not believed are living in a love for darkness and don't want their deeds revealed.

This might be a good time to point out what verses 17 and 18 say

### **John 3:17-18**

**<sup>17</sup> For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. <sup>18</sup> He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

It is very important for you to know that if you have never believed in Christ, if you have never submitted to His Lordship and received His death as the payment for your sins, if you have never committed yourself over to Him to be a follower of His, if you have never changed your mind about your sin and begun the process of turning your back on it, you are living in God's condemnation. That is a big deal. That is the biggest bad news on this planet. So come to Christ. Receive the reason that He offers. Receive His offer of salvation today. Believe in Christ.

OK, We must assume that Christ was preaching **the true Gospel**, this gospel of repentance and remission of sins. If that is true, how do we understand repentance based on what Christ said to Nicodemus?

The way I understand it, belief must entail the concept of repentance. And repentance must entail the concept of belief. They are two faces of the same coin. How can that be?

Well, we need to remember what the definition of repentance is. It is changing one's mind. When we truly understand what **believing in Christ really means** we begin to understand just what a monumental change in mind that really is.

One of the quotes from Curtis Hutson who preached the sermon I read said this. **Faith and repentance are the same; they are not two separate decisions. One cannot trust Christ as Saviour without repenting or changing his mind. The very fact that he trusts Christ for salvation shows that he has changed his mind regarding sin, salvation, and God.**

I think Mr Hutson is partly correct. We cannot truly trust Christ for the salvation offering He gives without having a radical change in how we see ourselves and how we see God. It is impossible to love God and love sin at the same time. It is impossible to be willingly compliant to our God, as our Isaiah text commands, and to be rebellious at the same time. It is one or the other. It is to change our mind about something and to turn our back on something else. It is to believe something and disbelieve something else. Mr. Hutson says that Faith and

repentance are the same thing. I think technically he is wrong there. But they happen together, and one cannot happen without the other.

We must be very careful how we present the gospel. This distinction must be clear. The worst thing we can do to a person inquiring about their own salvation is to present them with **an idea of believing that only adds Jesus to their life**, like an exercise routine that might be an inconvenience at times, but it will help them to enjoy their lives more over time. No. That is not belief. And that is not repentance. A person in that condition is not likely to truly enjoy either their salvation or their sin. They will be wasting time. If they are **not going to be saved**, they will waste time **trying to do good things from time to time**. If they are **going to be saved** they will have **wasted time in the sin** they have tried to enjoy. We don't do anyone a favor to wrongly describe saving faith. We cannot lower the price of admission so we fill the halls. We must disciple those we bring to the faith and that discipleship involves helping them obey like we obey. It is a sad thing when the church allows people to flounder in this no man's land of belief, wandering between the two enemy camps.

One of the most helpful sections of the sermon I read is where the author dealt with faulty ideas about repentance.

I loved the simple reasoning he applied here to make his point.

**We have heard some well-known preachers say, "If you want to be saved, repent of your sins, turn from your sins." If turning from your sins means to stop sinning, then people can only be saved if they stop sinning. And it is unlikely that anyone has ever been saved, since we don't know anyone who has ever stopped sinning.**

Sloppy thinking leads to sloppy speaking. Sloppy speaking just spreads more sloppy thinking. And sloppy thinking leads to sloppy living. We need to think about this word we use so often. What does the Bible mean when it says repent? If we are preaching a message of repentance, and by that we mean primarily to turn from sin, especially if we think we do that as a condition for salvation, we are left with a big problem. Here is another quote from the sermon.

**Several years ago I read a book by a professor at a fundamental university. Under the chapter on salvation, he said, "Quit your sinning, and God will give you a new heart." He presented repentance as turning from sin. I wrote this dear brother and expressed my concern, knowing that such teaching frustrates the unbeliever and makes him think that salvation is unattainable since he cannot live a sinless life. This professor wrote back that he had repented, that he had turned from his sins. When I wrote to ask if he had sinned after he was saved, he had to honestly answer the question and admit that he had. I explained that if he had sinned after he was saved, then he had not turned from his sins; he had only turned from part of them, that is, the ones he had not**

committed since he had been saved. He then agreed to change the statement in his book.

If repentance means turning from sin, and turning from sin means to stop sinning, then a person must live a sinless life in order to be saved. And if that is the case, then nobody could ever be saved, because there are no perfect people.

You don't get better to get saved; you get saved to get better. You can't get better until you do get saved. In reality, one can begin living better only after he is saved. When the individual trusts Christ as Savior, he receives a new nature. Second Peter 1:4 says, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." With this new nature come new desires and new power to make the desires a reality.

This repentance that we are commanding is a bigger concept than to stop sinning. What we are preaching is a complete change of mind about everything we wrongly think about God, ourselves AND our sin. I have tended to always assume the word "repent" was primarily referring to repenting of sin, confessing sin, feeling remorse about sin. But that is not always true. We have got to judge by the context what we are to repent about. God is said **to repent** lots of times in scripture. And yet he was never repenting of sin. He was always repenting of a plan of action that He had chosen. He was changing His mind about what He would do. Odds are that is more of a figure of speech for our benefit than an accurate description of God's decision making process. Why would a God who always knows everything change anything He had planned? But we get the idea that God moves in our favor, even when things seem stacked against us. But again, we need to look at the context the word "repent" is used in to know what the word "repent" is referring to.

Another misconception about repentance is the idea that we must experience extreme sorrow if we are truly repentant.

Another quote from the sermon-

**The Bible says in II Corinthians 7:10, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of...."**

**Though godly sorrow may bring about repentance, it is not the same as repentance....**

**We have heard well-meaning preachers tell of their experience of salvation and describe their weeping and sorrow and how miserable and low-down they felt before they were saved. In doing so, they suggest to the unbeliever that he must feel a certain amount of sorrow before he can be saved. If that is the case, then how much sorrow must a man feel and exactly how much must he weep**

**and moan before God will save him? This kind of teaching suggests to us the false idea that God is basically unwilling to save sinners, and unless one softens the heart of God by his tears, then God will never accept him and grant forgiveness for sin....**

**The problem is not that God is adamant and unapproachable but that man will not respond.**

**The great evangelist D. L. Moody insisted that the inquirer was not to seek sorrow but the Savior. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His shed blood is sufficient for the forgiveness of sins. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."**

Repentance can't be measured by the amount of emotion it produces. Humans are capable of producing all kinds of emotions. We can cry like crazy when we are caught with our hand in the cookie jar. We can also cry when we think crying will win us sympathy instead of rejection. But that is not repentance. Theoretically repentance could come with no emotion at all. Maybe to the more cerebral types it can be experienced as simply being terribly wrong about something. To others the **realization of living wrong** and the **feelings about it** could come years apart. So repentance is not measured by the volume of sorrow produced. But it is measured in the change of behavior that **is consistent** with the change of mind. I used to drink diet sodas. At some point I believed that those soda's are worse for me than almost any other choice I could make. I now do not drink diet soda's except on rare occasions. I repented of drinking diet soda. That change of mind did not produce a lot of emotion, but it did produce a change in my behavior.

So what does repentance look like? Even when it involves repentance of sin we see it takes various forms. It doesn't always look the same.

Let's look at 4 kinds

First we will look at people who knew that obeying God was a big deal. These people are living with a desire to obey God. That is what they want most. But they were unaware of the specific sins they were committing. They were ignorant of God's commands. So they want to obey. They understand it is important to obey. But they are ignorant of what God says.

Let's look at what happened to King Josiah. The King had never read scripture before. But the Book of the Law was suddenly discovered where it had been hidden. Josiah had it read to him. And this is what happened.

**2 Kings 22:11**

**<sup>11</sup> Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes.**

The king immediately acted by getting his spiritual people to inquire of God for Him. King Josiah was a person who wanted to please God. He truly was acting in ignorance. But when he read the law he was instantly and severely convicted of his own sin and the sin of his people.

We see a similar thing happen with King David.

Nathan the prophet went to King David and put his sin to him in a way that he would be able to see it clearly. David said **2 Samuel 12:13**

<sup>13</sup> "I have sinned against the LORD."

Psalm 51 reveals David's heart about the ordeal.

### **Psalm 51:1-19**

<sup>1</sup> **Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.** <sup>2</sup> **Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.** <sup>3</sup> **For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.** <sup>4</sup> **Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight-- That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge.**

David wanted to please God. But somehow these particular sins escaped his notice. When he saw them he was stricken in a way he was unlikely to forget. His conviction was specific. He knew **which** sins he had committed and was confessing them.

Now let's look at the second kind of repent-er. Sometimes Christians **know what sin is**, they **aren't ignorant that they are committing it** like God says Josiah and David were, but they are not truly convinced that **committing those sins is really that big of a deal**. These people often have not **grasped** or have not **retained** the importance of the Lordship of Christ. God's commands are more like suggestions on how to live. These people experience conviction and repentance a different way. It isn't sudden and specific. It may be gradual and general. They repent, not so much of a specific sin, but in their careless way of living. Their conviction won't be like a lightning bolt of revelation, it will be more like a gradual awareness of a condition.

This is what was written to the church in Sardis-

### **Revelation 3:2-3**

<sup>2</sup> **Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.** <sup>3</sup> **Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.**

These people were not to repent of a specific sin. They were told to repent and get back to the state they used to be in. Many Christians find themselves in a state where the problem isn't so much that they don't know what is wrong. They



just don't really care. They don't see how **what God says is all that important.** The people in Corinth seemed to be this kind of people. Paul's arguments were targeted, not so much at what things are sin, but why obeying God in those things matters so much. This kind of repentance is going to take soul searching. It is going to be a confession of attitudes that are the problem. It may involve confessing specific sins, but it is often more a confession of a heart condition. This will tend to be started by a gradual seeing of one's self as we truly are. Then a confession that **the way we are living is not right.** This confession is not so much a result of ignorance about what God says. It is a confession that we simply **don't care about what He says.** This may be a dramatic event, but it will probably not be one that happens out of the blue. And the focus on the sins confessed will be more about the **state of our heart** than the **technicality of what we have done,**

Next is the third person. This is the person who **knows what God says** and **understands that what God says is important.** But this person **chooses to sin anyway.** I John 1:8,9 describes the process of confessing sins as they are done

**1 John 1:8-9**

<sup>8</sup> **If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.**

<sup>9</sup> **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

This repentance of sin will be done item by item. This person wants to please God, knows what God says, but fails anyway. They know **what needs confessed.** They agree with God quickly. They are not choosing to continue in any known sin. In fact, they desire to remain in the light. And that light continually exposes their sin. So their confession is specific and often, and usually not very dramatic.

This is what most Christians experience who have been saved for a long time. We have become used to the idea that we are sinners. We are not surprised when we sin because we know what we are like. But we have realized that we desperately need to be right with God. So we confess quickly and specifically.

And last is the fourth person. He is **the rebel.** This person **knows what God says.** He understands that **it is very important.** But he has **zero intention** of doing what God says. The prodigal son is a good example of this. His repentance was general. It was dramatic. And it probably took a process of his own failure before he got to the place where he was ready to give in, to surrender.

I hope this is helpful in understanding that repentance of sin doesn't always look the same, it isn't always experienced the same, it isn't even always focused the same. And that is ok. As God gets hold of our hearts He will draw us back to Himself. Sometimes our repentance actually tells us more about the state of our hearts than anything else we can remember.

It is also important that we understand that repentance is not always singled on sin. We need a change of mind in so many ways on so many things. But the one thing is sure. When we believe in Christ, truly believe in Him with all we have, it will change everything about us. It will change thinking, attitudes, actions, expectations, focus, our hopes and dreams. This change of mind will produce changes in us we would never dream of. We cannot limit repentance to merely the cessation of specific sins. Repentance changes who we are. Repentance is a change in belief. And our belief is the core of our salvation.

Everything that is right in our lives and everything that is wrong in our lives traces its way back to the same source- what we believe. Our successes and failures trace their way back to what we really think in our heart of hearts. Truth in the inmost places, which is what God wants, sets us free. Lies in that same place chain us to behaviors and attitudes that only hurt us and others. I am suggesting an experiment this week. Every time you are tempted to sin this week, ask yourself this question. What do I really believe about this thing? Not what does the Bible say I **should** believe. What do I **really** believe? When we find differences, that is where repentance is best focused. That is where repentance will have its greatest result. We don't need to be distracted by whether we feel bad enough. We simply need to ask the question, "Is Christ worthy to have us change what we believe based on what He has said?" Is He worthy of repentance at this point in my life? Maybe we will have some stories for our fellowship next week that we can share with each other.