

**Jeremiah 4:1-22; “The Acts of True Repentance”, Sermon # 4 in the series – “Heart Lessons Learned, for a Prophet and the People of God”,  
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012,  
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

When the word “repentance” comes to mind, how do you define it? You will say to me (if you are faithful to the Bible), repentance is a change of mind; it is a turning from sin unto God with full endeavor to render a new obedience to Him. And if you are correct in your definition you will also say that repentance is a saving grace. It is a gift given to each one who believes. It is a part of God’s effectual call; even as we have been granted faith, we exercise faith. Even as we have been granted repentance, we should be endeavoring to exercise repentance. Both faith in Christ and repentance are necessary to salvation although for different reasons. It is true that neither our faith nor our exercise of repentance merits favor with God, but still the exercise of each is necessary. We need to exercise faith in Jesus Christ by believing that He has merited everything necessary unto our salvation. It is He who has lived the perfect and sinless life in the sight of God. It is He who has suffered for our sins. It is He who has risen from the dead and can and does convey to the believing sinner resurrection power in order to their learning to do and keep His commandments.

Placing your faith in Jesus is an act that you do, but it is only done by grace. We are not saved by even the best of our works. But exercising repentance is the same. We can only truly repent if we have received grace; that is, the power and the wisdom necessary to consider that we should turn away from sin, and then to go about to actually do it. We find these precious things by looking to Christ for them. The grace to believe also brings with it the grace to repentant. And therefore, both of these, believing and repenting are something that we must exercise in order to be saved. Since we are not saved by our works we are not saved by our repentance, but if we have been given grace, we will repent and we will find that we have the power to turn away from all of our sins. And turn away from them we must, or we will perish forever in our sins. The Lord Jesus says in Luke 13: 3 – “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” He was speaking that truth to his closest disciples.

And so we can say at the very start of this message, that if we have true and saving faith in Christ we will also have repentance. They are 2 sides of the same coin. They are fraternal twin sisters of the one Father – Even God. When we are born again we receive the stamp of the heavenly likeness upon our mind and heart. We have received grace. We have been adopted by God into the heavenly family and we are considered sons and daughters for Christ’s sake. Our Heavenly Father has given us certain duties, certain chores to attend to, each and every day of our life in Christ. These duties involve definite spiritual actions on our part if we are to forsake our sins; if we are to be holy. Even if you are not a Christian yet, the duties are still the same. These things you must begin to do if you would be saved. You are not to wait until you feel the power of God to begin to do them. When you come to know

where it is in your life that you are sinning, go to God in prayer and ask Him, through Christ, to give you the power to do what is right. I would like you to listen carefully as I explain for you the 4 spiritual actions of our text; the actions which we must take, in order to forsake sins and to make progress in holiness. 1<sup>st</sup> – We must break up our fallow ground. 2<sup>nd</sup> – We must not sow among thorns. 3<sup>rd</sup> – We must circumcise our hearts. And 4<sup>th</sup> – We must wash our hearts from wickedness.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – We must break up our fallow ground.** (verse 3a)

“For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: ‘Break up your fallow ground and do not sow among thorns.’” The fallow ground here is the heart of man that is not cultivating righteousness as he should. It is the heart that neglects the duties of devotion to God, it is the heart that forgets that God has an expectation of us to do what is good, what is right, and to follow after what is true. This fallow ground is hard ground, full of weeds and thorns because that person is following a pattern of living to themselves. They are promoting their own self-interest instead of living to God and seeking His interests. Each of us must stand, as the farmer does, and look out over the field of your life and see what needs to be ploughed up. You need to take deliberate actions to break up the patterns of the old life; of the sinful old life. You must deliberately undertake to break up this fallow ground.

I have had to learn this lesson the hard way this past week in a physical literal sense. As many of you know I put up a garage behind my house this past winter and the ground was too hard for me to deal with, trying to make smooth the areas around where the concrete was poured during the winter. So I waited until this Spring and knowing that I needed more dirt to fill in those areas, Brian Squiers graciously helped me out by bringing me some dirt to fill these areas in. Well I found that some of the dirt was hard clods, and as a result I had to spend quite a bit of time breaking those clods up. It was hard work, but it paid off. I was able to redistribute that dirt and fill in the low areas of the yard.

Similarly, you and I must take the initiative with the hard areas of our hearts to break up the fallow ground. We must learn to break up the clods of past sinful habits and neglects of doing God’s will and the places of our heart where we have resisted His will; these must be broken up in order to glorify His holy name and honor Him with the way that we live our lives. If we have had other gods before God; other things which took up our most of our spare time and which we were devoted to, we break up and throw out those old loves. If we once worshiped God in a different way from what the Bible commands, we break up those old patterns of thought and replace them with the Biblical ones. If we once used to swear and use coarse language, we change and break off with foul speech of every sort in order to become holy. We must turn away from dishonoring our parents by disregarding their counsels. We must turn away from sensuality and stealing and lying and covetousness and pride of every sort.

We must do this as a part of our repentance. When we hear the command of God to do these duties we must not stop to wonder if it seems like Arminianism to begin to do what we know that we cannot do apart from grace. We do not need to stop and

ask ourselves whether God is at work or if He has opened our heart. That is His secret will. He does not ask us to discern this. He does expect us to repent, and to ask Him for grace to do so. If we have not, as yet, come to Christ, we still must seek to know ourselves. We seek to know God, but if we are sincere, we must understand how great is the rock that blocks the path to God; how hard is the adamant heart that is within our breast if we do not know Him. We want to know God, but we will have to break up our fallow ground. Ask yourself, is my heart hard and unbroken by the Law of God and the Love of God in Jesus Christ? Then cry out to Him that He would show you saving mercy. He can move the rock that blocks the road to Him. He can take away the love of any sin which you have loved for years, but now would like to see removed from your heart.

Let us ask ourselves whether we have seen and have believed the truth that God has given us His commandments for our good? Have we seen this great truth that is found over in Psalm 25, verse 14? “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant?” “My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net.” What is David talking about here? God, it seems, has a secret. And this secret is related to living a holy life. The secret is related to how a person prospers in spiritual things and when we make it our highest aim to prosper in spiritual and eternal things, we will discover the secret. In verse 12 it says, “Who is the man that fears the Lord?” “Him shall He teach in the way He chooses.” “He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth.”

The prosperity that is being spoken about is the secret prosperity of the soul that comes to the person who repents of their sins and is looking for the good things which God alone can bring to their soul. The commandments of God are not burdensome to one who understands the secret. The worship of God is exciting to one who knows the secret. Obedience is not just an outward conformity to a set of laws given to you by God. Obedience is a matter of the heart. That is where it begins. And how is this secret entered into? It is entered into by prayer. And after praying about it, confessing your sins, it is entered into by seeking to bring forth the fruit of righteousness to God in the way that you live.

Turn with me over to Hosea 10, verse 1. “Israel empties his vine; He brings forth fruit for himself, according to the multitude of his fruit He has increased the altars; according to the bounty of his land they have embellished his sacred pillars.” “Their heart is divided; now they are held guilty.” “He will break down their altars; He will ruin their sacred pillars.” Now look down at verse 11 – “Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh grain; but I harnessed her fair neck, I will make Ephraim pull a plow.” “Judah shall plow; Jacob shall break his clods.” “Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you.” What was sinful in God’s sight about Judah and Jacob? It was their seeking to bring forth fruit unto themselves and not to Him. It was that they had divided hearts. They loved their own ideas of what was religious instead of God’s word through the prophets. Whereas they were

supposed to love God with all of their hearts, they were pursuing false worship. Their whole conception of serving God needed to change. God would help them with this. They were to seek the Lord “until He rained righteousness upon them”. Are you praying to find righteousness? Are you pursuing righteousness? Keep praying until you find it, have it, and are doing it. The end of the law for righteousness is Christ Himself and His righteousness. And in finding Him you will find the source of all of your righteousness. Would you love God, serve God, and bear fruit unto His holy name? Think it not a light thing to find that kind of grace. Pray until you do find it. Christopher Columbus, it is said, when he was out to discover the New World, “his men became weary, he was so long in sailing, and so they resolved they would return back again; so all their labor had been lost.” “But Columbus came to them with all entreaties to go on a little time, and at length prevailed with them to continue the voyage but three days longer. So they were content to venture three days, and within those days they began to see land, and so discovered those parts of the world of which before we knew nothing.” (Related in Jeremiah Burrough’s commentary on Hosea 10: 13) “Now, what a miserable thing had it been if they had come back and lost all their voyage!” No, seek the Lord until He come and rain righteousness down upon you. And you will find a whole New World lies before you. **2ndly – If you would forsake sin and be holy you must not sow among the thorns.** (verse 3b)

“Break up your fallow ground, and do not sow among thorns.” Do not sow – that is, do not spend your time and strength on thoughts and actions that will nullify the force of the truth of the Word of God upon your soul. In Matthew 13, in Jesus’ parable of the sower, the seed sown among thorns is “he who heard the Word and the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word and it became unfruitful. O, do not sow to the thorns of the world! There is no joy for the Christian in trying to get riches. The world’s big joys – its entertainments, its fashions, having the approval of men, its boasted pomp and show, all of this will come to nothing in the end. Remember the words of the hymnwriters.

*Glorious Things of thee are spoken – Zion City of God.*

*Savior – “If of Zion’s City, I through grace a member am – Let the world deride or pity – I will glory in Thy Name. Fading is the worldling’s pleasure – all his boasted pomp and show – Solid joys and lasting treasure – none but Zion’s children know.”* Another hymn says, “*Is this vile world a friend to grace to help me on to God?*”

Let us ask ourselves if we are attempting friendship with the world? If you are then you will make yourself an enemy of God. Such is written in the book of James, Chapter 4, verse 4. To sow to thorns is to sow to your flesh. If you will turn over to Galatians 6, verse 7 you will see this. “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” “For he who sows to his flesh will reap

corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.” Let us resolve by the grace of God that we will not make provision for the flesh for the flesh to fulfill its lusts. Rather, as it says in Romans 13: 14 we must “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”. We must clothe ourselves with His grace and live according to His truth. We must not walk in the old spirit of partying and drunkenness, or lewdness and lust, or in strife and envy. But we must sow to the Spirit. We must consciously attend upon bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, and self- control in everything that we would do.

**Then the 3<sup>rd</sup> spiritual action we must take if we would forsake our sins and be holy is to circumcise our heart.** (verse 4)

“Circumcise yourself to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.” You say, “How embarrassing!” “Why does the Word of God through the prophet, to the people, speak in this way?” “How can a person remove the foreskin of his heart?” Well let’s see if we can diffuse this embarrassment. Circumcision was given for what reason? It was given to Abraham as a sign and seal of the covenant made with him by God. In Genesis 17: 10 it says, “This is My covenant which you shall keep and your descendants after you – Every male child among you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. What was the covenant between God and Abraham? It was that he would be the father of many nations; that it would become this in the way contrived the false reasoning of Sarah giving Hagar to Abraham to wife. It would not be a promised Messiah descending from Ishmael. But the promise would be fulfilled in Isaac and to his descendants. It would not be law, but grace.

Circumcision was the covenant sign that God would bring His Messiah (His Savior) through the Jews – His distinctive and holy people. And this is what relates to our text. The Jewish people of Jeremiah’s day gloried in their circumcision, gloried in the fact that they were God’s chosen and special people, but their hearts were hard, insensitive, and wicked. Their lives were as bad or worse than the uncircumcised heathen peoples around them. And here we must ask ourselves this searching question. “How am I, how are we, distinctively different from the heathen people around us in a God-glorifying sense? Are we really living for God and Christ and showing forth this difference which comes by obedience to the word of God? Am I willing to suffer the contempt of the world, its disapproval? Am I boasting in the cross of Christ by which the world is crucified to me, and I to the world? Do I evidence the fact that I am a new creation, a distinctive blood-bought possession of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Make your heart distinctively His, if you haven’t before. Perform the operation of spiritual surgery upon your heart which is necessary to set yourself apart to His purposes. If you do not know if you are born again, ask God to give you a new heart.

Consciously cut off your allegiance to the world and to the flesh. That is what you must do to be in covenant with God; circumcise your heart.

**And then 4<sup>th</sup> – We must wash our hearts from wickedness because true repentance requires daily and regular heart inspection.** (verse 14)

“O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved.” “How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?” You all, no doubt, know the benefits of daily looking at yourself in the mirror and having a daily shower or bath? And you would not think of neglecting such duties for the body. But what about your soul? “Once saved, always saved”, is a great maxim if it is rightly qualified. But “once clean always clean” cannot be tolerated. “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” says David. And Paul says, “Since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” This is the duty of the truly repentant Christian. Especially we must get rid of the vain thoughts that lodge within us. Some thoughts are like bad lodgers that take up residence in your mind and heart. Thoughts of distrust of God, thoughts of self-justification, thoughts of covetousness, envy, pride, foolishness, thoughts of anger and malice. All of these are diabolonians who reside in the soul of man and they counsel rebellion against God’s word. We must cleanse ourselves from all thoughts that are sinful and vain.

Vain thoughts are the false assurances we give ourselves that all will be well with us even though we ignore God and His word. I have tried to show you this afternoon some of these: self-righteousness, unbelief, pride, a double heart, seeking your own way instead of God’s. I hope that no one here will entertain them or let them lodge in their breast. But rather repent and forsake your sins. Remember that Jesus wore the thorns for you the sinner. “Oh sacred Head now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down. How scornfully surrounded with thorns Thy only crown.” “O sacred Head what glory, what bliss til now was Thine, yet though despised and glory, I joy to call Thee mine.”