

New Sermon Series: First Things First - Repentance
Matthew 4:12-17
January 16, 2011

Since we're beginning a new year, we thought it would be interesting to consider what did Jesus tell people **to do first** or what do we see in his life and ministry that he **put first**. We often hear the old saying, "you've got to put first things first.." When we were given that advice we know that means there has to be priorities in our lives. I have always loved the advice by Pastor John Ortberg in his book, *The Life You Have Always Wanted*, because he states that what is important is **not always keeping a lifestyle of balance; but a well ordered heart**. Its about having the wisdom and willingness to put the right things first and to address certain issues or needs over others. So if our desire is to draw closer to God and be as strong as we can as a Christian and congregation, then we hope God uses this First Things First series to guide and change us.

We thought the first place to start as we spend sometime in the gospel of Matthew is to look at the first sermon Jesus ever preached. I initially thought at least according to Matthew's gospel the first sermon Jesus ever preach was the Sermon on the Mount with the well known "Be-attitudes, that begin with "blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God, blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted and so on..." etc.

But the first sermon Jesus preached was about repentance. Just think out of all the topics he could have preached about such as love your neighbor, heaven, hell, money, marriage; his first sermon was repentance. Lets take a look.

Read Matthew 4:12-17

The Bible says Jesus came preaching repentance because of

something and that something was the kingdom of God is near. The power and truth of God in Christ was breaking into life like watching the dark clouds of storm approach. Jesus was like the messenger that a king would send before arriving at a given location. His personal messenger would go ahead of the king and announce that he would be arriving. The content of the messengers' message meant something.

It meant he spoke with certainty because he represented the king. The poet **Goth** is known to have once said, **“Tell me of your certainties I have doubts of my own.”** (Barclay, p.75) He spoke with authority because he was sent by the king. The message came from a source beyond the messenger; it came from the king. When the scriptures says Jesus preached he came with a message of certainty and authority from God. He said the kingdom of God is near. The presence of God is here; not in its full complete presence or there would be no evil; but it is near you and so it is time to repent.

Repentance Defined

But lets make sure we know what repentance is. Repentance means to make a spiritual U-turn.

Jesus knows one thing clearly about our human nature and our human condition - none of us are completely okay just the way we are. None of us have every aspect of our beliefs, principles and actions all going in the same direction of God's will.

Every once in a while we hear of someone who while driving turns onto the wrong expressway ramp and winds up driving head-on into traffic. The first sermon Jesus preached was on repentance because spiritually we all have more than our share of spiritual head on collisions with sin to avoid and to cleanup.

Repentance applies to the person who has never made decision about Jesus Christ, it applies to the youth who have been baptized as infants but now are at the age where you can confirm your own faith about Jesus, its for the person who has been Christian and serves in the church - all of us have aspects of our lives moving in the wrong direction and we need to make a spiritual U-turn toward God.

What does Repentance require? What does repentance demand?

In the New Testament the word repentance comes from two Greek words meta = “change” and “noeo” thinking. “Metanoeo” = change thinking or rethinking. (Vine, Bible Dictionary)
But the change of thinking needs two things. We need to know what God thinks and what God desires for our lives so we can turn toward God.

When Jesus calls for repentance he is calling us to get moving with God, get our lives flowing in the direction of God’s will.

The second thing we need to see is that biblical repentance involves some concrete steps we take by faith.

Conviction - Acts 2:37 Experiencing conviction is most often the first step in repentance . Conviction is described in the Bible when God’s will, God’s truth is connecting at the very core of who we are. Conviction is taking place in our hearts and minds when we start calling into question who we are and how we have been living based on God’s truth. Acts chapter 2 has the great story where the Apostle Peter was preaching how Jesus came, he loved and yet was rejected by his own people. The religious leaders said they were “**cut to the heart**” by the words of Peter. That is conviction. Conviction is that disease we have that something about who we are and how we’re living is not consistent with God it is not consistent with who Jesus Christ is.

If your sitting here today and your conscience never bothers you; you should be worried. If you know someone that never questions whether they are wrong and in error, they should be worried. Because so many of the great stories of God working in peoples lives happened when they made spiritual U-turn and they began to be convicted or cut to the heart by God's truth. Conviction is part of the turn around process.

Contrition - 2 Corinthians 7:9

Another step we see as a part of the process of making that U-turn is to experience contrition. Contrition is to regret what we have done; not just that we got caught. The problem today when we see famous politicians and sports figures speaking of their remorse for how they have lived, it seems they are more sorry they got caught than truly beginning to see how wrong they have been living? Only God knows their heart; but real contrition turns the regret on ourselves; not anger toward those who confront us. Jesus said he was the light that has come into the darkness. Real contrition accepts the light of God's truth and help and begins to be sorry for the mistake the failure. Real contrition moves toward the light of God's guidance it doesn't try and stay in the darkness of secrets, denial and excuses.

The Apostle Paul wrote at least twice to the church he once pastored at the city of Corinth. He confronted them about many things including a man who had acted sexually immoral and for the entire church for not confronting the situation. Finally the church took action and later Paul writes to them in a second letter and states, **“Now I rejoice; not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance; for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us. For godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.”**

Next to Jesus, The apostle Paul is arguably the greatest figure or

hero of the New Testament. **He knew there was not just a time for one individual to be address about repenting and regretting how they were living but an entire church.** The problem is churches can be so focused on making people happy, having people come back - we avoid the need to encourage the godly sorry and grief that all of us at times have to face if we are going to live clearly for Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 12:2 states that we are “To lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely to us...”** What holds many churches back is not their location, not their age of members, or their style of worship but a lack of courage and stomach to preach that there is a time to wear the shoe of contrition and godly sorry and if the shoe fits then we wear it so we turn our lives away from sin back to Jesus Christ.

Contrition is the godly sorrow that helps us turn around, it's the spiritual wake-up call to change. We must experience contrition at times personally and as a church.

Confession

Read a good repentance story in the Bible and there also is going to be confession. The prodigal son confessed he wasted his father's inheritance. Zacchaeus confessed he cheated people while collecting taxes. The Apostle Paul once said he was the chief of all sinners. Those confession came as their turned toward God and others.

Pastor James Mc Donald states, The word confession in Greek is homologeo. It means, "to say the same thing." When I confess my sin, I say what God says about it. But to say what God says about sin I have to see sin the way God sees it. (preaching today, James McDonald, 1/2011)

To make a spiritual U-turn means we say aloud were wrong, promises weren't kept, lies were told, mistakes were made whatever the failure might concern. Confession is the voluntary admission. Confession is admission to ourselves, to others and

God. Confession is so important because when things can be said aloud the greater the chance there is of coming to terms with the reality of our situations. Many here know of the tradition of 12 steps groups like AA that open up with people giving their name and stating they are an alcoholic. There are often jokes made about that ritual but there is power in the repeated confession and admission.

Now don't get me wrong there are some issues and experiences we go through that don't constantly need to be brought up time and again and if brought up perhaps amongst certain people. But for the most part if we cannot not talk about our sin aloud, we are either in denial of our sin or were ashamed of it and not living repentance.

Conviction, contrition and confession and we know that often we have seen including in ourselves those qualities but sometimes real change never occurs. We know anyone can say the words their sorry and they regret their mistakes. The guy or gal that cheats on their spouse, girlfriend or boyfriend can apologize again and ask forgiveness. The co-worker who said they would cover your responsibility only to once again let it slide can say how bad they feel. But there are two other steps that really show whether our repentance is a true U-Turn to God.

Restitution - Luke 19:8-9 Repentance is also going to require restitution. The willingness to make right the wrong of our sin - is restitution. The willingness to repair the damage done we have done or the injury we have caused. In the story of Zacchaeus and Jesus, when Zacchaeus is touched by the light of influence from Jesus Christ he said he would give half of his possessions to the poor and pay back pay anyone he had cheated 4 times which was more than the Law of Moses required.

Restitution in the Bible is if you wounded someone some how you

make it right as best you can. If we have damaged someone's reputation by talking to a certain group of people then we go back to that group of people and make it right. If we have let someone down we go back and correct it. If we have cheated someone out of money we pay it back.

Reconciliation - 2 Corinthians 5:18 Beyond repairing the damage repentance demands we reach out to the people or situation we have hurt or hindered and seek to build a new relationship. I mentioned earlier that Paul wrote that troubled church at Corinth with so many problems including people not getting along over various issues. He wrote a second letter and in chapter 5 verse 18 says, **“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has give us the ministry of reconciliation.”**

The best definition I have heard for reconciliation is this, it means to be a bridge that makes it possible to cross from one cliff over to the another. God's love revealed in Jesus is the bridge between God who is pure and complete and we who have sinned and are flawed and broken. Paul tells the church, the role Jesus played was to be bridge so people could be linked and connected to God. We have been given the ministry of bridge building. Real repentance is not just a one person act it takes two or more. Sadly at times we Christians aren't very good bridge builders. We get mad and avoid, pull away those who hurt us even if they reach out the hand of friendship. Listen even if a person doesn't demonstrates these qualities of repentance; were called to be bridge builders to others. Paul writes, we're called to make the first move. But especially if we have injured some one else there must be a point when we go to them and seek to restore. If we have been hurt and are approached by the one we perceive who has done the damage, scripture teaches us to be a part of building the bridge of friendship and healing. There is nothing mature, divine, or biblical when Christians especially leaders in the church pull away.

We have been given the ministry of reconciliation. It is one of the key steps to make a U-turn toward God.

Where are you in the spiritual U-turn of repentance? Where does your life need to get more in flow with God's will. Where is God calling you to be a part of what he is doing and if nothing else it is high time to repent of the apathy?