



AMAZING REPENTANCE
SUNDAY OF BARNABAS THE APOSTLE
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Mark 6:7–13

And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. And he said to them, **"Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them."** So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. So far the text.

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN!

After Jesus was rejected by His hometown, He moves on to other villages, teaching as He goes. Now the time has come for efforts to be multiplied: Jesus commissions the twelve to declare His Word. This is no vacation. Jesus is sending them out as His messengers to proclaim His Word, not their own. He tells them to take nothing extra for the journey, and to expect little along the way. The Gospel of St. Matthew fills in some important details,

"And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town" (Matthew 10:13-15).

Wow, now that's quite a statement. The disciples are going to declare some news, and those who reject that news will have it worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. You remember Sodom and Gomorrah? They had a horrendous fate: Because of the sin and immorality of the people, the Lord destroyed both those cities by setting them ablaze with fire and brimstone. So whatever the disciples are going to say and teach must be pretty crucial, it's important stuff. If people hear about the consequences of the message before the disciples arrive, you can bet they'll want to listen. The twelve are about to convey a message from the Son of God, an important message an incredibly earth-shaking message.

So are you ready? Are you prepared to hear this life-and-death message-eternal life or worse-than-Sodom-and-Gomorrah-death? We find out what the message is in verse 12: ***"So they went out and preached that people should repent."*** That's it, "People should repent".

That doesn't sound all that exciting or earth-shattering or special does it? We've heard about repentance before. Maybe that wasn't the big thing that people were supposed to pay attention to? Maybe it was how the disciples healed the sick or cast out demons? No! Those miracles were there to draw attention to the message; and the message was that people should repent.

It makes sense if you think about it. Repentance is not a glamorous word especially these days; when we think "Repent" we visualize a crazy man holding up a sign, or a word we learned in confirmation class that we think has no real bearing on life anymore. However, as Christians, repentance is the very center of our lives. According to Scripture, repentance has two parts: Contrition, that is sorrow over sin; and faith that Christ has redeemed you from sin. Both parts are necessary: If you are deeply sorry for your sin, your sorrow does not earn forgiveness. Judas was deeply contrite for betraying Jesus; but because he failed to believe in Jesus, his sorrow only led him to despair and death. On the other hand, belief in Jesus without contrition is useless: If someone says, "I believe that Jesus is my Savior, but I don't have any sins to be saved from," it is a false confession that leads to death as well.

Your life as a Christian is a life of repentance. A worship service is an exercise in it. We begin with the Confession and Absolution. First, you confess your sins and declare your sorrow for it. Then you hear the Absolution telling you that you are forgiven for the sake of Christ who was crucified for you; and that Word of

forgiveness strengthens your faith to believe in Him. Confession and Absolution has two parts because it is repentance in action, sorrow for sin and faith in Jesus.

Let me put it another way: Repentance is the work of Law and Gospel, the two principal doctrines of Scripture. The Law shows our sin (SOS) and causes sorrow for it. The Gospel then declares that Christ has redeemed you from your sin, and you are forgiven. In other words the Gospel shows our savior (SOS). God has given His Law and Gospel to produce contrition and faith; in other words, God has given His Word specifically to bring you to repentance.

So there you have it, Repentance, "Confession and Absolution" or Law and Gospel. Both are about repentance. So is it any surprise that, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door, the very first one that led to all the others said, *"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent' [Matthew 4:17], He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."*

This also explains why Jesus would make that astonishing statement that, for those who reject the disciples' message, ***"it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city."*** To reject repentance is to deny the guilt of one's sin, and to reject the forgiveness that Jesus has won. It's to declare that the Lord is wrong in both His Law and His Gospel. You see it is unbelief, not believing that Word of God to be true. Unbelief damns-it's the only sin that can, because it rejects the forgiveness that Christ has won, it rejects the message of forgiveness that the Holy Spirit preaches into your ears. The citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah were a wretched, perverted lot; but if any of them repented as the fire fell, they could have avoided the curse of hell forever. But for the one who persistently refuses to repent and trust in the Lord, there is no hope at all.

Repentance as I said before is not a glamorous word, but repentance is at the very core of a Christian's life. This is important, and perhaps I can illustrate how.

Over the past year I've made several calls and visits. Most our members have managed to avoid the hospital or nursing home; but Salem is often the closest city with a major hospital and numerous nursing homes. Now and again I receive requests to visit people from out of town or those who have lost connection with the church. Or I get called into a hospital room while visiting one of our own members. To say the least I've stood beside several deathbeds. I've heard chaplains from the hospital or nursing homes talk with the dying people like an owner talking to their dog, that's a good boy, it'll be alright. I'd like to tell you what I have said to each one of these people as I've visited them.

I've told them to repent.

Sounds a bit harsh and insensitive, doesn't it? A patient lies terribly ill from a disease, and I tell them to repent? But let me explain why.

When a patient is admitted to the hospital, doctors and nurses and others work very hard to bring them back to health. That's the vocation God has given them, and they are a gift from God to us. With all the training they receive, it's not up to me to go in and tell the nurse what to do. I'm not against miraculous healing; but I certainly accept that the Lord does work through means, like medical personnel.

While medicine is a great gift, diseases are still puzzling, malignant things. At times, doctors will not be quite sure what to do. When someone is on a deathbed, everyone recognizes that everything medically has been done, and it's out of their hands. This is the battle between sickness and health, life and death, from the perspective of medicine.

However, all of this is more than just a matter of medicine and the body. Disease and death are the wages of sin; they happen because we live in a sinful fallen world.

This is what I talk about when I visit the sick and dying. I don't need to preach the Law very much at all: Their own bodies are preaching to them the wages of sin is death without my help. So I speak of how, because of sin, sickness and death are unavoidable; this is an undeniable truth of life in this world. This is preaching the Law. If we were not under the effects of sin, why would we be sick and dying? But the message doesn't stop there, of course. I seek to tell patients that our Lord Jesus Christ has carried their infirmities and has born their diseases to the cross. He has died in their place, and He has conquered death and risen again for them. This Jesus now declares that He has made them His own in Baptism. He will use all things for their good. He will

provide healing in this life as He wills. And when death comes, He will raise them up to everlasting life and eternal healing.

So take, for instance, one who is on their deathbed. I share with them the truth that their condition is because of the sinfulness that saturates all of us, and that as we well know, we cannot save ourselves. I also declare to them that the Lord has redeemed them from sin, death and the devil, and now will use death to deliver them from a dying body to an incorruptible body in heaven.

In other words, I've told them of sin and its consequences and I've announced the Gospel to them. I've talked about sin and grace; in other words, this is a message of repentance a message of Law and Gospel.

If it still seems harsh to speak of repentance to one who is dying, let me point out; the one who is dying sees matters of life-and-death far more clearly than you and I do; and as that foreseeable death approaches, there is no sweeter sound to the believer than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is in that Gospel they hear that their Savior has already conquered death, and will lead them through that valley of the shadow of death. It is also in that Gospel that they hear that they will be raised from the dead.

Now, I don't share this message only with those who are seriously ill or dying. But I declare this message of repentance to you in every sermon that I proclaim; if I fail to do so, then I have departed from the teaching of Jesus and His apostles. It may sound strange, but the job of the pastor is to prepare you for death, no matter how much good health you enjoy at the moment. While we may not know the time or hour of our death, we do know that death will come for each of us. Unless the Lord returns first in His glory. Either way, we will stand before the Lord; and it is only by repentance, by the forgiveness won by Christ that we are prepared to meet our Maker.

So it is my privilege once again to declare to you this day, the message of repentance: There is hope for you. Hope over the troubles that you face, whether they be mistakes or guilt or afflictions or whatever serves to remind you that you are sinful and cannot save yourself. Do not seek to justify those sins, for they are out to destroy you. Instead, confess your sins and your failings for what they are: for your sin cannot save you.

And rejoice! For the Lord Jesus Christ has been crucified for your sins and is risen from the dead. He has already given you life in your baptism, and even now He sustains you with His Word and His Holy Supper. He comes to meet you with forgiveness, so that you might be prepared to meet Him in glory. Therefore, confess your sin and believe in Jesus. In other words, repent. That's the life of the Christian, a life of repentance. A life of confessing your sin and trusting in the grace won by Jesus for you.

May this, then, be our life and our message. Repentance is hardly a glitzy topic these days-and you can bet that the devil, the world and your sinful flesh work hard to keep it that way. Yet, there is no sweeter imperative from our Lord than this command, "Repent." It is the soul's equivalent of Jesus saying to a sick body, "Be healed." For it is by, and only by, that work of God, repentance, that you and I have hope of salvation. By His Law, you know your sin and need for a Savior. And by His (†) Gospel, you trust in the Savior who has redeemed you. By His grace, you rejoice in amazing repentance, because repentance brings you this amazing news of grace: You are forgiven all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Name, amen and amen!

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, AMEN.