

THE IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE

Bible Reading Matthew 4 v 12 – 25 (NLT)

12 ‘When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

13 He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

14 This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

***15 “In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,***

***16 the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.***

***And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow,
a light has shined.”***

17 From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

18 One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. 19 Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” 20 And they left their nets at once and followed him.

21 A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too.

22 They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.

23 Jesus travelled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. 24 News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. 25 Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.’

SERMON

Matthew's Gospel is the first Book of the New Testament. It was written by the Disciple Matthew somewhere between 20 and 40 years after Christ's death.

In chapters 1 and 2 we learn about Jesus' ancestors, how his earthly father was a descendent of those great men Abraham and King David to mention just two. Matthew then tells us about Jesus' supernatural conception and birth, the visits by the shepherds and the wise men.

In chapter 3 we are told about the arrival of John the Baptist proclaiming to the Jews that the promised Messiah has arrived in the form of Jesus Christ. He tells the people they are sinful and need to repent and be baptised. Baptism – an outward sign signifying that as we go under the water we have died to self, and as we come up out of the water it signifies we have risen to a new life in Christ.

Jesus then meets John and is baptised Himself, which tells us that baptism is very important!

In the early part of chapter 4 we learn about how Satan tempted Christ in the wilderness and how Jesus overcame the devil, by speaking out to him the words of the Bible - the truth - to counter Satan's lies and deception.

But this afternoon for the next fifteen minutes I want to focus on verses 12 to 25 which I read to you earlier, which tells us how Jesus began His ministry.

What can we learn from these passages?

Well when I prepared for today I noticed five things.

First in verses 13 to 16, we see that Jesus, demonstrated His obedience to God's Word in order that many people might be saved. If He hadn't left His home town and gone down to Capernaum, these people, whose lives were in darkness, would not have heard Jesus talk about the critical thing they needed to do to obtain salvation. We will come to that shortly but first let's look again at verses 13 to 16:

13 'He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.

14 This fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah:

**¹⁵ “In the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali,
beside the sea, beyond the Jordan River,
in Galilee where so many Gentiles live,**

**¹⁶ the people who sat in darkness
have seen a great light.**

**And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow,
a light has shined.”**

So, those people (and this passage says MANY gentiles lived there) were unaware that there was more to life than their daily routine of sleeping, getting up, eating meals, having an afternoon nap, playing with their children or grandchildren, and going back to bed again.

Jesus went there to wake them up! This afternoon I believe God wants to wake us up with a series of questions. Are you awake to the Word of God?

Are you sitting in darkness?

Do you need ‘the light of the world’ (as Jesus called Himself) to get rid of the dark things in your life?

He desperately wants to do that for you. He loves us all so much!

The second thing I found interesting was what Jesus preached!

So, in verse 17 we read:

‘From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”’

The very first thing, then, that He preached was:

‘Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near’. (Or The Kingdom of God is near).

These were exactly the same words John the Baptist used when he was preaching in the wilderness to the people a few months earlier. I find this interesting. Why did Jesus find it necessary to repeat what John had said? I am sure for Jesus to repeat what John said means it must have been VERY important!

As I study Scripture more, I have concluded that the concept of repentance is something people do not like. It is repeated over and over in God’s Word. In Acts 2 v 38 after Jesus’ death and resurrection and the formation of the early Church, the unbelieving people said to the Apostle Peter in response to being convicted of their sins ‘What should we do?’

Did he say ‘be nice to everybody and do lots of good things so you can be sure of getting a ticket to Heaven’? No Peter said exactly what John the Baptist and

Jesus said. He added a couple of words because maybe they weren't sure what was meant – He said ***“Repent, be baptised in the Name of Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”***. The Bible says 3,000 men were added to the Church community that day. We see in Acts 3 v. 19 that just a few days later he said to the Jews in the Temple, exactly the same thing!

Oh for a man like Peter to come to the Isle of Wight, that we might see thousands saved!!

Returning to Scripture we find a few years later in Acts 21 v 21, the great Apostle Paul, who had the Damascus road experience and went on to write 2/3 of the New Testament, in a great speech, said to Jews and gentiles alike that in order to be saved (in other words to go to Heaven when they die), they must repent, turn to God and have faith in Jesus Christ.

Have you repented?

Have you turned to God?

Is your faith in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation? Or is it in something or someone else?

The job of the preacher is to preach The Truth. Not my truth, but God's Truth.

You see if you have faith in your good works – in other words, that you'll go to Heaven if you do lots of good things, this is not the Truth from God's Word. So, if it isn't God's Truth, what is it?

As hard as it may be to hear, it is a lie, and this kind of lie comes from Satan – the enemy of God. Somebody may have taught you, or preached to you, that all you need to do, to be sure of eternal life is to be good - to do good works; but such teaching is a lie from Satan. Tragically, some other religions teach the same lie.

How can I say this? In John's gospel (ch 10) we read that 'Satan's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy, but that Jesus came to give you a rich and satisfying life'. Another translation says that He came to 'bring life that you might live it to the full'! Amen!

Paul tells us straight in Ephesians ch 2 verses 8 and 9 that we won't get to Heaven by our good deeds. It actually says: 'God saved you by his **grace** when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it'.

Yes it good to do good things, God wants us to do good things but we are not saved by those good deeds, 'that no-one might boast' says Paul. To refer to just two verses of the many that we can read, John 3 v 16 and Acts 4 v 12 – Salvation is possible only through Jesus Christ. We are saved only by the shed blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. And at the end of the day, the entire Bible is based upon that crucial truth.

I digress, although I believe it was an important digression – I was actually talking about repentance. Why is it SO important to repent? Because God says so!

Some people are surprised to learn that even in the Old Testament, God talks about the need for repentance. This is what God says to His people in Ezekiel chapter 33, vv 11 to 16:

'As surely as I live, says the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. Turn! Turn from your wickedness, O people of Israel! Why should you die?

¹² "Son of man, give your people this message: The righteous behaviour of righteous people will not save them if they turn to sin, nor will the wicked behaviour of wicked people destroy them if they repent and turn from their sins. ¹³ When I tell righteous people that they will live, but then they sin, expecting their past righteousness to save them, then none of their righteous acts will be remembered. I will destroy them for their sins. ¹⁴ And suppose I tell some wicked people that they will surely die, but then they turn from their sins and do what is just and right - ¹⁵ For instance, they might give back a debtor's security, return what they have stolen, and obey my life-giving laws, no longer doing what is evil - If they do this, then they will surely live and not die. ¹⁶ None of their past sins will be brought up again, for they have done what is just and right, and they will surely live.'

In the New Testament we learn that it is important to confess and repent so:

What does it mean to repent?

To confess means to tell God what we did was wrong. Agree with Him that sin is sin – it is wrong.

Repent – means simply to turn around, and to do the opposite of the sinful things we have been doing.

In effect it means I am doing the wrong thing, going the wrong way.

I am following my thoughts, or man's thoughts and not God's. I will now turn to God's way for my life. I will turn back to God and follow HIS ways...

Have you repented?

Have you turned to God?

Do you repent daily?

Every time you realise, or God's Holy Spirit prompts you to realise, that you have done or said or thought something wrong? Do you repent?

I have spent a lot of time on this point because I believe it is the most important point I can bring out from this Bible reading. We are never too old to confess and repent. And it doesn't matter WHAT we have done wrong. Many prisoners have turned to God and been saved. Murderers, drug dealers, you name it. When Jesus was crucified, the thief next to him on the Cross turned to Christ and was saved! Our sins do not condemn us, on the contrary, provided we repent; John 3 v 17 says, ***'God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.'***

There are three more things I wanted to touch on but because of time I will just summarise them.

The third thing I noticed was that as soon as Jesus came up to four fisherman and told them to follow Him, they dropped everything and simply followed Him, even leaving their family and their businesses.

Let's read it again

18 'One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. 19 Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" 20 And they left their nets at once and followed him.

21 A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too.

22 They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind'.

Are you following Jesus?

Peter, Andrew, John and James were fishing to make a living. They turned immediately, did an about turn and followed Jesus. These men became four of Jesus' twelve disciples. Three of them wrote eight of the New Testament letters. If Jesus walked in here now, would you give up everything and follow Him?

Or think of it this way. What would you like to do before you die?

These four men became fishers of men (Evangelists, Vicars or Ministers if you like), simply by following and obeying their new master Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus wants to enable you to fulfil His wonderful purpose for your life.

Why not turn to Him, pray to Him – he will help you do it.

My fourth point is that Jesus taught the people:

In v 23 it says: ***'Jesus travelled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom'***.

Let me ask you. Do you have children, grandchildren, great grandchildren maybe?

We are never too old to teach them about God. If you don't tell them, who else will?

Tell them about your faith too. Most young children will be very interested. And remember they may not learn it anywhere else!

My final point is Jesus healed

The reading concludes with:

'He healed every kind of disease and illness. ²⁴ News about him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—he healed them all. ²⁵ Large crowds followed him wherever he went—people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River'

Jesus healed every disease and sickness AND the good news is he heals today.

Jesus healed those suffering severe pain, mental illnesses, the demon possessed, the paralysed, people with skin diseases, epileptics, every type of pain and illness. Nothing is too difficult for Him.

I am going to close now and take an opportunity to lead you in a prayer concerning the very first thing Jesus ever preached when he began His ministry here on earth. The need for us to repent - to turn from our wrongdoing, our pride, unthankfulness, selfishness, unforgiveness; whatever it is that we find ourselves struggling with - and turn to God, to receive His cleansing forgiveness and restoration.

Jesus said repent and turn to God. The phrase 'Say it and Mean it!' comes to mind.

Have you recently said to God privately or publicly: *"Lord, actually my life hasn't really changed much. I'm not living for you. I'm living for me, my family, my friends."*

Helping and supporting family and friends is a good thing – God is not asking us to neglect them, but is asking us to place Him first in our hearts and lives so that all that we do for our loved ones and others flows out of our love, devotion and worship of the Lord who sent His Son Jesus Christ to be crucified for our sins, so that believing in Him and have faith in Him, we might be saved

Is God first in your life?

If you know God isn't first in your life, or even if you just want to say to God again that you are sorry for the times you have not put Him first in your life, you may want to agree with these words either quietly or out loud, by saying

Amen