

The Great Sayings in the Gospels
Message 122
Zacchaeus,
True Repentance, Part Two, Why Repentance?
Luke 19:1-10

- 1 And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.
- 2 And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.
- 3 And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.
- 4 And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.
- 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.
- 6 And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.
- 7 And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.
- 8 And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.
- 9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.
- 10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. KJV

Introduction:

In the last message we were introduced to Zacchaeus and discussed some of the issues related to genuine repentance. We learned that in Genuine Repentance one comes face to face with God as the Law Giver. Zacchaeus confessed and made amends for the great sins of covetousness that had dominated his life and driven him to defraud others.

We learned that Genuine Repentance changes one's view of Jesus Christ, coming to see Him as the Savior for the sinner's awful problem of guilt before God. Necessarily, there is also a drastic and permanent change of one's view of himself. Powerlessness on a profound scale is the universal sense of all repenting believers who are truly being dealt with by God. We come to see that we have an infinite problem in that we have sinned against the Infinite God but also that we have no power to remedy the problem. We also learned that Repentance brings a change of mind about how one should live.

Today, I would like to further the discussion and talk to you for a while about "Why?" Why does God demand Repentance? Why is it so necessary?

I would like to read to you another story of repentance from the life of one of the last kings of Judah before the Babylonian Captivity.

2 Chron 33:1-9

- 1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem:
- 2 But did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.
- 3 For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, and he reared up altars for Baalim, and made groves, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them.
- 4 Also he built altars in the house of the LORD, whereof the LORD had said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever.
- 5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD.
- 6 And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.
- 7 And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God, of which God had said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen before all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever:
- 8 Neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from out of the land which I have appointed for your fathers; so that they will take heed to do all that I have commanded them, according to the whole law and the statutes and the ordinances by the hand of Moses.
- 9 So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.

I think that you would agree that Manasseh was a wicked man and an awful king. Two things compounded his wickedness. First of all, his father was Hezekiah, one of the better kings of Israel. Secondly, God sent warnings to him by His prophets that judgment was coming if he continued in his path of wickedness.

- 10 And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken.

But he did refuse to hear and, so, God brought an awful judgment upon him.

- 11 Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

Taken literally, these words mean that they put a ring in his nose and hooked a chain to it as well as binding him with double chains. One can scarcely imagine a more humbling scene for a king.

But in prison, in Babylon, he ‘got religion.’ Well, so what? Many people get religion in prison and then, once released, go back to their sins.

- 12 And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,
13 And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.

But, it seems, the repentance was genuine. The Lord heard him and restored him to his throne. So, how did that work out?

- 14 Now after this he built a wall without the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entering in at the fish gate, and compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height, and put captains of war in all the fenced cities of Judah.
15 And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city.
16 And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel.

He reversed course and undid, so much as possible, the damage that he had done. But his children were still dead and he had to live with that. Not all of the damage that we do through sin can be undone.

So, Why Repentance?

First of all, to any person who would sincerely ask that question, I say, you have no idea who God is, who/what you are, or how hideous sin really is.

There are Three Reasons that I was to give you today to answer this question. #1 and #2 really must be considered together.

1. God is Great, Holy, and Powerful beyond our wildest imagination,
and,
1. Sin is an offense against Him so profound that the human mind can only barely comprehend it.

We said last week that we consider offenses based on our appreciation or understanding of the power of the one we have offended.

The universe is so vast that we cannot imagine the size of it: 100 million galaxies, each of which contains 100 million stars, somewhere between 20 and 40 billion light years across, filled with all kinds of strange and unusual objects. And God created all of it, set it in order, and sustains it by His Word.

On top of that, He is so holy that the very sight of Him would utterly destroy you and me.

Now, imagine sin, the conscious, willful, deliberation violation of reasonable rules for living made by this Great Creator of All Things, committed by one whose very existence is because of Him and is continually kept by Him.

Here is a point that many cannot see. My “smallest” sin is so grievous and offensive to Him that if it were the only sin I every committed, and if it were not atoned in some fashion, He would destroy me forever for having committed it. That is how Holy He is.

And, this is how grievous and awful sin is to Him. It is hideous, vile, and evil to the degree of infinity, every one of them, from the greatest to the smallest. He will not look upon it with pleasure nor approval and He will most assuredly judge to perfection every one of them.

It is so very difficult for us to imagine the nature of sin and God’s revulsion toward it.

Isa 64:6

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.
KJV

Imagine, if you will, that you come home from work or shopping and you meet a truck pulling out of your driveway. On the side of the truck is painted “The Ebola Waste Removal Company.” You pull into your drive, pondering what he was doing there, but when you open the door you find that in the middle of your living room floor, piled from the floor to the ceiling, are the clothes, rags, bandages, bed linens, and towels from the last ebola patient who died.

How horrified would you be? Not only is this filth in your house but now your house is possibly forever uninhabitable. We would be completely revolted, would we not?

Yet our best efforts at morality apart from the enabling of God, Isaiah says, are like that to Him. We are unclean and our sins have carried us away.

The holiness of God an the horror of sin are two of the main reasons that God demands Repentance. There must be a recognition of the uncleanness of sin and an addressing of it that honors appropriately the Majesty of the One offended.

There is enough sin in the best of us to eternally condemn all of us.

Reason #3 is one that few take note of and even fewer deal with all the implications of it.

#3. Because sin is so horrific, it wounds and cripples the one who commits it, leaving him/her vulnerable to satanic intrusions.

Before I begin here I must acknowledge that this subject is enormous, too large by far to be well covered here, so I will deal only with some of the high points concerning the damage done to the sinner and leave the issue of satanic intrusions for another discussion.

The scriptures reveal that there is far more to sin than merely the fact that we have violated some technical rule. When we sin, we have intentionally, with malice and forethought, rebelled against or refused to obey, the Living God. It is a conscious act of rebellion that no amount of moralistic whitewashing can cover.

And... God has programmed us with a registry, a memory, of the times that we have rebelled. Each event has been assigned a value, a weight, with which we both evaluate the sin and ourselves. The program is called "Conscience" and it is very useful and very effective. It bears witness to us that God is Holy and that we are wicked.

To the degree that we have not brought our sins to God in True Repentance, to just that degree, we have the sense of our guilt before God.

Consider a couple of passages of scripture.

1 John 1:9

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. KJV

Notice the words "and to cleanse us." There is far more to the issue of repentance than being forgiven.

Ps 51:1-12

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.
4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.
5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.
6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.
7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
8 Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.
9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.
11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.
12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. KJV

Notice here: "wash me," "cleanse me," "my sin is ever before me," "purge me," "created in me a clean heart," "renew a right spirit," and "restore joy."

All of these speak of the perceived damage done to the person of a genuine believer by his sin. Notice particularly the issue of a sense of cleanliness needed, the spirit not right with God, and joy that has been lost.

These issues are separate from the offense against God. They reflected an injured soul in need of healing separate from the matter of forgiveness. Notice also that David believes that only God can repair the damage that he has done to himself and that his sin has worked in him.

We learn that even a true believer can be damaged by sin in such a way that the damage remains until God ministers healing directly to the soul.

What are the symptoms of the damage?

- a sense of uncleanness, guilt,
- a spirit that has not, in experience, been set right with God,
- no profound joy.

What is the remedy?

Exactly what David did.

- he grieved the sin before God,
- he confessed it and asked for forgiveness,
- he continued the conversation until his soul was at peace and again filled with the joy of the Lord.
- He lived with the damage that he had done and had caused, convinced even more profoundly of his sinfulness apart from God.

Repentance is not finished until, so much as possible, the damage has been undone and the soul is truly and completely restored to full communion and fellowship with God.

So, Why Repentance? Because of the Majesty, Holiness, and Power of the One Offended, because of the horrific vileness of sin, and because of the great damage that sin does to the one who has sinned.