

“THE FRUIT OF REPENTANCE.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

August 13, 2017, 10:30AM

Scripture Text: Matthew 3:1-10

Introduction.

I have three Sunday's left in our summer before we turn our attention to the fall. Since we have been focusing on fruit this summer I have decided, Lord willing, to devote these three remaining summer sermons to three more fruits.

The fruit of repentance.

The fruit of righteousness.

The fruit of our labors.

Fruit is a wonderful thing, how does it fit with repentance. Can repentance be fruitful and if so how does it produce fruit? What is the fruit that grows out of repentance and how do we bear fruit that is worthy of our repentance?

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Before we answer that we need to step back and hear why John the Baptist was even talking about repentance.

For four centuries God, had been silent, no voice from heaven, no prophet on earth. And then suddenly out of the Judean wilderness a man came in prophet's garb, in the spirit of Elijah. For a people starving for a word from God, hungry to hear the truth, this was welcome news. A voice crying in the wilderness saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

John the Baptist came announcing two coming events, two things that impact every human being, a coming wrath of God and a coming kingdom of God. There was an urgency in John's voice, this kingdom and its king was coming soon. The ax is already laid at the root, the winnowing fork is in hand.

If someone rushed in here right now and said the church is on fire, but if you leave now you will get out alive, would that be good news or bad news? It's a warning, but its good news.

The call to repentance is good news and grace because it is given before the coming judgment. The first-time Jesus came to earth it was to usher in the kingdom of God and

offer forgiveness of sin to all who repent. The second-time Jesus comes it will be to usher in the judgment of God on all who refused His first offer.

The call to repentance is urgent because those who reject it will not enter into the kingdom. Repentance is the way in, the entrance, the prerequisite, and necessary condition for salvation.

The nature of repentance.

Repenting is not reforming ourselves or improving ourselves, its more than sorrow over getting caught; its more than self-condemnation, more than kicking the dirt when we drop the ball; its more than wallowing in guilt or shame or despairing over our helplessness or weakness.

The word repentance means to change direction, to do an about face, to surrender our old way and adopt a new way, to have a change of heart and mind.

The first evidence of repentance is acknowledging and confessing our sin, calling it what it is, agreeing with God about it, hating it and turning from it.

There are two kinds of repentance in Scripture.

First, there is Prodigal Son repentance, or Zacchaeus or Paul on the Damascus Road repentance.

This is conversion repentance, turning away from sin and toward Christ in faith. This is when God by His Holy Spirit removes the scales and opens our blind eyes to our real condition of our souls and quickens our hearts to believe the Gospel. We will sing of this in a moment.

This is Peter at Pentecost preaching and the people being cut to the heart and asking, “What must we do to be saved?” And he answers, “Repent for the forgiveness of our sins that you might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Second, there is David and Bathsheba repentance, or Jesus in the Lord’s Prayer repentance. This is daily repentance.

Daily repentance is one of the fruits that proves the first repentance. This repentance is the way of life for every Christian, daily killing our indwelling sin is the work of a lifetime.

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance” (Martin Luther, first sentence of 95 Thesis).

John is calling us to daily hate our sins and turn from them and turn to God and be reconciled to Him.

But having said that, while repentance begins with words, the words are proven real in action. Repentance starts as an inward renewal, that then shows itself outwardly as good works and good actions. The tree of repentance is good if there is good fruit.

John warns every tree that has no fruit will be cut down, so bear fruit worthy of your repentance.

Fruitless repentance and fruitful repentance.

John the Baptist was one of those no nonsense straight shooters who tells it like it is. He spoke the truth about sin. You must repent in order to be saved. Your repentance must be proved by its fruits, by evidence that it's real.

Not being one to mince words, he was especially harsh with the religious leaders who were known for their pride and hypocrisy. They were notorious for making outward displays of religion, while their hearts were not changed. Their hearts were bad so their fruit was bad.

Talk is cheap. It is vain to say with your lips one thing, but believe in our heart the opposite.

Furthermore, John had to dispossess them of the false notion that their privileged position as Jews was what could make them right with God and save them.

They took the covenant to mean if they were born a Jew they were good with God. In arrogance, they forgot it wasn't Abraham's blood that saved, but his faith. As the saying goes, God doesn't have any grandchildren, only children saved by grace, faith and repentance. Repent and believe, or perish.

Don't flatter yourself by thinking if you are baptized or a member of the right church or give money or are from a good family or don't do bad things like other people then you are good to go.

Today John might say even if Martin Luther or John Calvin or Pope Francis or Billy Graham were your father it wouldn't do you any good. Even if you were Dutch and Reformed. No one is saved by their ancestry or heritage.

Fruitful repentance moves from the heart to our head, mouths, hands and feet. As faith without works is dead, so repentance without fruit is dead. And lack of fruit will bring judgment.

Fruitful repentance is seen in the desire to make things right, to make restitution, to pay back, to be reconciled, to put away bitterness, anger, malice, to show love and charity, generosity, and be others oriented. It will show in our wallets.

We show the fruits of true Biblical repentance in a deep desire to abstain from worldly passions that war against our souls; a deep desire to break from ingrained sinful habits, to hate darkness, to resist the devil and flee quickly from temptation; a deep desire to please God and walk in His will and ways, in paths of righteousness all the days of our life's.

The joy of repentance.

I have preached about repentance many times here, but there is one aspect of it I don't think I have been as clear on or have failed to emphasize. I want to focus on the joy of repentance.

Repentance is hard work, it can be painful. It is serious, not to be taken lightly. But there is a joy in repentance also, and it is this fruit I want to reflect on with you. I want you to know the joy of repentance. I want to preach for your joy.

Our repentance should have both a Good Friday aspect and an Easter aspect.

David in his great prayer of repentance in Psalm 51 said,

Psalm 51:8, 12 Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation.

The first step to joy in repentance is always found in the truth. John came proclaiming the truth. Those who had ears to hear welcomed it even though it was convicting.

This is why I often say when you confess your sin be honest, use strong words, acknowledge the weight of your offense against God. Like when David said to God, "against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:4).

The path to joy in repentance always leads through the truth. If we make excuses or cover up or blame others or make light of it, we won't find joy because we are still in bondage and not yet free.

But too many of us are wallowing in guilt and shame and remorse and the devil's condemnation and believing we have sinned passed the point of God's grace and mercy and patience.

Micah 7:8-9 Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise;
when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.

9 I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment *for* me [not against]. He will bring me out to the light; I shall look upon his vindication.

God has already executed His judgment for you in Christ. He has already brought you out into the light of His salvation and vindicated you.

Remember Paul's great wrestling with his sin in Romans 7:

Romans 7:15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ... 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

When you feel condemnation it is Satan trying to steal your joy. When you are crushed by the weight of your sin, repent and then joyfully believe you are forgiven. Remember how the Father treated the prodigal son when he came home and confessed his sin.

Repent and then joyfully remember how there is rejoicing in heaven over a sinner's repentance and enter into that joy. Why does repentance cause joy in heaven? Because it honors God and makes much of the salvation God has secured for us in Christ.

Repent and then joyfully remember Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father as our great high priest praying for us, interceding for us, pleading our cause for us because of the price He has already paid for us and our sin and forgiveness. He washes each of our sins in His own precious blood.

Repent and then joyfully remember Jesus preaching on the Sermon on the Mount,

Matthew 5:3-6 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Repent and joyfully remember the prayer of David:

Psalms 32:1-2 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.

Repent and joyfully remember the words spoken each time we come to the Lord's Table: Take, eat, remember and believe the body of our Lord Jesus Christ given for the forgiveness of all our sins.

Take, drink, remember and believe, the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ poured out for the forgiveness of all our sins.

And out of doing this there will come another fruit of this joy that follows repentance. It will lead to deeper repentance. I am more aware than ever of God's rich and generous and unmerited grace toward me and one of the effects is to make me sadder for my continued sin. How can I continue to sin against God who has been so exceedingly kind and good and gracious to me? It breaks my heart all the more.

And deeper repentance leads to deeper joy.

The more we love the grace of God the more we hate our sin more. The more we love the beauty of God's holiness the more we feel sorrow over our lack of holiness.

Joy-filled repentance makes us hate the sin more.

Repentance leads to the joy of forgiveness and forgiveness leads to freedom.

When someone has come to me to ask me for my forgiveness, one of my joys is to be able to say to them, "In the name of Jesus, I forgive you and set you free from this sin." Our heavenly Father takes great joy and pleasure in saying that to us.

We deny ourselves so much when we won't humble ourselves before each other and confess our sin and receive forgiveness from our brothers and sisters.

It leads to restoration of relationships. It leads to the defeat of guilt and shame. It defeats Satan's grip. It leads to joy and peace and a clear and clean conscience

Don't despise God's humbling us in our sin, it is the path to our greater joy and freedom.

Repentance produces fruit that leads to joy and blessings and benefit. I preach this repentance for the sake of your joy, for the sake of your true happiness in this life and the next.

This is cause for repentance, this is cause for joy, this is cause for worship. Leave here today in the joy of your forgiveness and redemption, and your status as a dearly loved child of your heavenly Father.