



## **Made Right with God-Part 6**

### **The Impact of Repentance**

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Repentance. Repentance. Seems like such a sad word doesn't it? I mean, there is a sense of austerity to it. It can sound very grim and very gloomy. There's no doubt, admittedly, for those of us who've rightly experienced it, we can't deny that there aren't tears and sorrow that are involved in the process, but as the first words of every point of this morning's outline would indicate, I mean, we would certainly assert that there's nothing more satisfying, nothing really more profoundly joyful, than us actually repenting of our sins. I mean, it is the key to the Christian life, there's no doubt about it. It's the key, actually, to life. I mean, let's make it clear, it's the key to eternal life. It's the key to eternal life because it's the key to getting right with God. Repentance.

I mean, it's such an important concept in Scripture. It is the culmination of the Gospel of Luke that we've been studying. The very last words of Christ in the very last chapter of Luke in Chapter 24, Jesus tries to summarize all of the prophetic word and he says this, he says, "It's the prediction that Christ would come and he would suffer, he would die, he would rise on the third day, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed to all the nations." I mean, therein is a synopsis of all of the theology of the New Testament. Repentance.

If I were to define it this morning, just at risk, I assume, of oversimplification, I might say this: that repentance is a life that's turned around. A life that's turned around. It's a life that is redirected, it's a path that's rerouted. And of course, theologically, it's a heart that's rewired. It is, perhaps, in the Biblical terminology, it's someone who's reborn. It is, as we like to say, someone who's been REFORMED by God. He has taken his life and has made him new. And maybe a better word, Biblically, he's transformed.

This is a work of God. It's repentance that is so central to the New Testament message. And we've seen in our study of Luke 18 that we wrapped up last week that there have been people who have refused this gracious work of God. They've stiff-armed Christ. They didn't want this. They didn't want their path rerouted. They didn't want their life redirected. They didn't want their heart rewired. And so, we've seen that and yet we ended our study last time we were together, at the end of Chapter 18, and we saw a poor blind beggar, who actually had his life remade. We saw his life turned around. We saw those statements of Christ as he declared that this man was a new creature in Christ as he described the way in which his faith had changed everything. And that stood in contrast to who we had encountered earlier in Chapter 18 of Luke, the rich young ruler, who was one of those who refused this work of God in his life. And that carried the comments of Jesus, you might remember, when he said, you know it's so hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It's hard for those that are well off. And here's the battle that's going on in the hearts of people who have a lot to lose when it comes to repentance. And yet right here, as we begin our study of Chapter 19, we are encountering a rich man who does just that. He has his heart rewired, he has his life redirected, he gets on a brand new path because God does a work in his life.

So today, when it comes to a text like this, I want to make sure that we study it very carefully knowing it's such a central concept in the Scripture. Take a close look at this scene and learn about the joyful impact and the vital process of the essential response that you and I are all required to have to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So let's look at it together in Luke Chapter 19, as we start a new chapter here and finish up our series this week and next on what it means to get right with God. Here we have a great example, 10 verses of a man named Zacchaeus.

Let's take a look at this text. I'm reading from the English Standard Version beginning in verse 1 of Luke 19. Follow along as I read it. It says, "As he entered Jericho," Christ of course in his group, his band, his disciples, "and was passing through. And behold there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was," look at this, "a chief tax collector," which is, we'll see, means that you hardly have to say the next phrase, "he was rich." You could say he was very rich, if he held that job.

Verse 3, "And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and he climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to that place, he looked up and he said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today." Verse 6, "So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He is gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.'" Verse 8, "And Zacchaeus stood and he said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I've defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.' And Jesus said to him," look at this phrase now, "'Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.'" And this classic text, which we often read and often quote, "For the Son of Man came," to do exactly what happened in this text, "to seek and to save the lost."

Zacchaeus. The great example of someone who had a lot to lose by repenting and he does so. And God changes his life and we have that title that we really started with, at least in our thinking. We use the word "justified" because Jesus used it in the parable of the tax collector on the Temple Mount, that story that he told, and the Pharisee, and one went home justified and the other didn't. Here's one that's going to have that salvation experience, having his sins forgiven, having a new life in Christ, being redirected in his path.

Now take a look at the first five verses and I want to show you something that I think we need not look over too quickly. It's something that if you know what the Bible says elsewhere, it should come as an eyebrow raising read for you because you think, well this is odd. It is odd. Verses 1 through 5 describe a man who knows this entourage is coming through town and it says in verse 3, "He was seeking to see who Jesus was." Now, apparently, as we know this ends with his salvation, this was a kind of seeking that we'd want everyone to have, a seeking after knowledge and insight and an encounter with Christ. That's a great thing. That's a good thing. As a matter of fact, he responds in verse 5 to this call when Christ says, "Hurry, come down, I've got to stay in your house today," and in verse 6 it says, "He comes down and receives him joyfully." That is a good set of circumstances for us to celebrate. That's awesome.

Here is a guy who seeks Christ, when Christ calls, he responds positively, and you might say, "Well, that's great, that's good news. I know a lot of people have responded that way." But if you know the Bible, if you know what it says about the problem of men's hearts, then you'll know this, that is an unusual response to Christ. As a matter of fact, that's a response to Christ you should not expect from people. And here's why. Romans Chapter 3 in describing the problem of our sin, it says this and I'll quote it to you, "There is none righteous..." I think you know the rest. "No, not one. No one understands and," here it is, if you have really thought about this as a completely universal statement, an absolute statement, "there are none who seek after God." None. That's a big statement to say.

But in this text, I just want to point out the fact that what this guy did in seeking after Christ, wanting to know who he was, Christ calls him and he joyfully responds, and we know it ends with



his life completely redirected, that is a process of seeking Christ and responding to the call of Christ, that is not the basic inclination of the human heart.

And as we look at this and say, "Hey, great, Jesus came to seek and save the lost," all the way back to those parables about the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin and the Lost Son, isn't it great? Heaven is rejoicing as we stand by, we try to make sure we rejoice, that's a good thing. Christ is seeing people saved because they sought him and responded rightly to his call. I just want to let you know that's not going to happen if the human heart is left to its own devices.

God has got to do something and here's a word for you and we don't get it from this text, but I don't understand this text without understanding the backdrop of the fact that if anyone is going to seek after Christ and respond rightly to the Gospel, God's got to do something, he's got to get involved in this. And here's a good word for you, let's jot it down, number one, we should be glad that God is in the business of doing this. What is he in the business of doing? He's in the business of, here it is, drawing sinners to repentance, drawing sinners to repentance. We should "Be Glad That God Draws Sinners To Repent." He has to get involved.

Some of you have a testimony here, you say, "Hey, I'm like Zacchaeus. I sought after Christ. He called me. I understand what it is to respond in repentance and faith in Christ" and I'm saying great. Well there's something going on under the narrative of your testimony, just like there's something going on under the narrative of Luke 19, that is God at work drawing you there. And without that, man, then you're like the rest of the sheep of this world gone astray. Each has turned after his own way. "There are none who understand and none seek after God." If God was not involved in drawing, it wouldn't be happening. Because I'll tell you what the experience is, the normal experience, to the call of Christ.

Now, theologically, if you want to think theologically for a moment, there are two ways we look at the Scripture and understand the call of Christ to the Gospel, of the call of Christ to repentance. We speak in terms of a "general call." There's a general call that goes out and people are told to, in any evangelist sermon they hear, in anybody sharing the Gospel at a work room table at work, anybody standing around and sharing the message of salvation through repentance and faith and what it means to be saved by Grace, all of that is a call, as we say to people, you need to respond rightly to this. It's a general call and the Bible says, as the general call of God goes out into this world, we can know this: no one is going to intuitively have the propensity in their heart to seek after God and respond rightly to it.

Matter of fact, let's go back five chapters real quick, this is worth looking at this morning, in Luke Chapter 14 and see the normal response to the Gospel. Here it comes in a parable that Jesus told. Now let's get a little bit of the setup for this, let's start in verse 15. Luke Chapter 14 verse 15. As someone says, what all of us, I think, want to say, "Isn't it great when people respond rightly to the Gospel." And this is what happened. As Jesus was talking about all these things, about people being saved, about people being included into the kingdom of God, the family of God, "One of those who reclined at the table," I'm reading, now, Luke Chapter 14 verse 15, "with Christ, he heard these things and he said," oh, you're talking about salvation, you're talking about the coming kingdom, "blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" That would be great. Yay! Bravo! Everyone who gets to heaven. Blessed is everyone who eats bread in the kingdom. Right? And I want us to kind of feel that for a second. We all say, "Oh, isn't it great when people respond to the Gospel? Someone stood up and said, 'Man, a guy at my office got saved this week. I was sharing the gospel, he responded in repentance and faith to Christ.' Isn't it great when people get it right and



get to go to heaven, it's awesome."

And Jesus says, well I don't think you understand. Let's not just say how great it is that people are getting it right. Great evangelists, great apologetics, great soft hearts, great responses, people smart enough and wise enough to get saved.

No, no, no. Here's the default position and inclination of the human heart. Are you ready? Verse 16, Jesus tells this story, "He said to him, 'A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.'" Let's call that, in our theological buckets, this is the general call of Christ. The general call of Christ to the Gospel. He invites many.

"And at that time of the banquet he sent out his servants to those who had been invited," and he said, here it comes again, here's another very direct imperative that goes out to those who are called to become Christians. "Come. Everything is ready now." Isn't it a great deal? You get all your sins forgiven, get to go to heaven, skip hell. This sounds like a great deal. Here, come, enter into relationship with Christ and be made right with God. That's awesome.

Verse 18, but here's the response. "They all alike," these people that don't seek after God, these people who are not righteous in their hearts, that's the default position of the human heart, "they began to make excuses. First one said, 'I bought a field, I must go out and see it. Please have me excused, consider me excused, I just can't make it.'" Verse 19, "Another said, 'I bought five yoke of oxen. I've got to go examine them. Come on, I got to check under the hood, these work vehicles I bought, I've got stuff to do. I really can't be there, so I cannot come.'" Another said, 'I've married a wife.'" No explanation needed there, it's just I'm busy. Right? "I can't come." Verse 21. "So the servant came and reported these things to his master. And the master said..." What? I can't handle this. "He became angry," and of course he would. Here are people who desperately need to be there. And I know this illustration is about you're living your life, got your normal life, but come and be at this great banquet, and if you turn it down, it would be like, "Oh, man, I'm offended. This will be great, you don't understand. This is better than you test driving your oxen or going out there and looking at the field you bought or spending your first few days with your newlywed spouse. Listen, you need to come."

And in our case, we understand the Gospel and we think about really receiving the due penalty of our own sin in eternity and thinking, "This is a great deal. Who would respond negatively to this?" God is saying, "Everyone is making excuses."

"So he gets angry and he says to the servant, "Go out quickly to the streets and the lanes in the city, and bring in the..." look at this now, "poor and crippled and blind and lame." Isn't that how we ended Chapter 18? Oh, the rich young ruler goes, "Nah, I can't do that, I'm not going to come and be part of your kingdom." But at the end, we got a poor beggar who responds rightly. And the call had gone out. And the servant said, oh man, we've done that and we can't we can't even fill it up with poor and blind and lame people. "'Sir, what you've commanded has been done and there's still room.'" And the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges,'" now highlight this, "compel people to come in, that my house may be filled." Compel them.

Now in theological terms the second bucket we talk about, if we want to use a theological term, the "effectual call of Christ." This is the compelling of Christ. Here's a word maybe that we're use to, and I've used it in the point this morning, in number one. It's the drawing of God, it's the pulling of God. It's as Jesus said in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father first," here's our



word, "draws him." He's got to draw him. Why? Because our inclination of the heart is, much like we've seen every time someone really encounters the true, unmitigated, unfiltered sense of who God is, whether it's Isaiah in Isaiah 6, you know, "Woe to me, a man of unclean lips," or even Peter, who says, "Away from me the Lord. I'm a sinful man" when he sees the power and greatness and majesty of Christ. If you really are going to be connected with the God of the Bible, your first reaction, as the book of Hebrews says, is to see him as a consuming fire and going, "I don't want anything to do with that." Just like they did at the base of Mt. Sinai. "Please Moses, you deal with God. We just want to... We don't want to be in that."

Now you want a false Christ, you want a plastic gospel, you want someone who is fake? Sure, people will flock to that kind of Christ but, you know, you've got to cherry pick verses in the Bible to create that form of Christianity. But the real Christ of the Bible, the Bible says, our default inclination is making excuses, pushing it back, doing what the rich young ruler did in Luke 18. And yet the Bible says, there are people getting saved. The poor and the blind, at the end of Luke 18, and now we're about to have a rich man. We just read the text, the first 10 verses of Luke 19. He gets saved, "Salvation has come to this house." So I know this, though it's not explicit in this text, you and I ought to be grateful that God is in the business of drawing people to himself, drawing people to cross that, and it is sorrowful and tearful, across that line of repentance.

You got a story? You could come up here and share your story, "I got a testimony." You would tell the narrative but you would have to understand this, you are being drawn by God to come to that place of brokenness and conviction and need and confession. God did that work in your life and you ought to be glad he does and he's in the business of doing it.

Love motivates this. There are two passages I couldn't help but bring to mind as I was thinking about the work of God drawing Zacchaeus and all of us who are saved here this morning, drawing us across that line. And if you're not saved this morning, maybe you're feeling that draw right now and God is pulling you across that line, or at least to the point, that critical point of conviction and repentance. I thought of Ezekiel 33 when God says, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked." I don't want you to die in your sin, "but rather I take pleasure in this: that the wicked turn from their ways," there is the concept of repentance, "and they live." That's what I take pleasure in, that they turn back, he says. So "Turn back, turn back from your evil ways, why would you die, O house of Israel?" God wants us to repent. It says in Second Peter Chapter 3 that is his desire. He wants people everywhere to come to the place of repentance.

The other passage I thought of was Hosea Chapter 11. I thought of that picture being drawn to God and I just do this naturally, you know, little gesture when I think of being drawn. And that's a great text that came to mind. "I led them with cords of kindness. I got them in bands of love." God is pulling this Israel, and this was an early prophet preaching to the northern tribes, and Assyria was coming after them, and here Hosea says, you know what, it's like I just want you to come to repentance, repent. It's like I put my lasso around you and I'm pulling you into repentance. God does that work and we should be grateful for it.

In the passage that started this concept of the seeking of the lost, in the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son, you saw the celebration in heaven when God goes out and successfully seeks and saves the lost. Isn't that how this ends? "The Son of Man came to seek and save," not to give them an offer and stand back and see what people do. Because if we're going to do that, every human heart in the world's going to go, "No, thanks but no thanks."



What the Bible says, God is actively out there in the, we call it the "effectual call of Christ" drawing people to himself. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Are you thankful that, like a shepherd, Jesus has gone out and drawn you to himself. When he finds the sheep he rejoices. And the Bible says, "There's more joy in heaven," we learned in Luke 15, "over one sinner who," what's the word, "repents." Repentance.

It really begins with something that's not explicit in this text, the drawing of the Spirit in your life. And maybe some of you who need to get right with the living God are experiencing that now and I encourage you, as Hebrews says, not to harden your heart when you hear his voice and that's the voice of God, the conviction of our sins. He sends his spirit out into the world to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. Don't harden your heart. If you hear his voice, respond.

How do you respond? Well, you respond like he did, verse 6 Luke 19. "He hurries back, he comes down and he receives them joyfully." He received him joyfully.

"He hurried down, he came down and received him joyfully." Now, that's the right response. It's one that, again, is only going to happen if God is actively involved in drawing sinners to repentance. But here he responds and he responds rightly and I'm thinking it's time to celebrate but, now it seems like a reprise of Luke 15 when the older brother couldn't handle the younger brother was now back, the Prodigal Son as we call him, and they're rejoicing over the fact that, though he was lost, now he's found, though he was dead, now he's alive, I figured he'd never come back and here he came back. Not as a father waiting at the doorstep, but as a shepherd or a woman sweeping the floor looking for the lost coin. God goes out, he seeks him, he draws him in, he comes in and the older brother goes, "Nah, I don't like this." And so it is here. Verse 7. "When they saw it they all grumbled. He," Christ, "has gone to be the guest of a man," Zacchaeus, "who is a sinner."

Now wait a minute, theologically we're all sinners. I think all the people in Jesus' entourage at this point, you're 17 miles out of Jerusalem, you're heading to the Passover, you're going to be crucified there later the next week, you're telling me you don't think you're a sinner?" "No, we think we're sinners but, you know, then there are real sinners. And that guy's a real sinner." Why? Well, we learned about it up in verse 2. Because he was a chief tax collector and you know that when you say you're a chief tax collector in the first century in Israel, you're going to be really rich.

They would pay for the right to collect taxes. Now this is the only time we hear about someone in the Bible who's a "chief" tax collector. It's a very unique word. And there are only three of them, as we understand from history, in the ancient world. If you know your maps of Israel, let's just picture this long skinny, you know, piece of land here. You got the Mediterranean Sea over here on the left. Right? You've got on this side, the right side, let's just call this the border here, the Jordan River, Sea of Galilee, Dead Sea. Here you have in the middle, the nation of Israel. And about the middle of the first century B.C., Rome starts going out and, I mean, they've been doing it for a while, but they went out then and just started taxing everyone all over in their conquest of the world.

By 167 B.C., citizens of Rome weren't even paying taxes. If you were a Roman citizen living in Rome you didn't have to. Why? Because we were sending our people out everywhere with our Roman soldiers and our strong arm and our iron fist, and we were making everybody pay our taxes for us. And when it came to the land of Israel, when Rome came in and conquered it, they set up three primary tax centers. One was in the Caesarea. You got your map here, here's the sea. Caesarea is a nice coastal town. It's a lot like Orange County, nice coastal breezes, you know, it's a nice place to live and it's where all the shipping from Rome came in. And so, right there you had a tax center



for Rome and you had a chief tax collector.

And then up north, as Jesus did a lot of his ministry up north in Galilee, there was a key city there. It was the same city Jesus used as his base of operations. It's the city of Capernaum and that was another tax center there and you had another chief tax collector there. So you had it on the west coast, you had it up north, and then in Israel you had one on the east border, near the Jordan River, not far from the Dead Sea, in a city called Jericho. And if you know anything, if you ever been to Israel and you go there and look at geography, you know Rome had put so much money into Caesarea, I mean, we see all the ports there, Caesarea Maritime we call it, it's a great set of ruins, if you're into history and archaeology, to see all that Rome poured into that city. And, of course, the tax revenue was huge in that city and the closer you got to those key cities the more taxes you paid.

Capernaum, and I think Jesus chose that city to be his base of operations in his Galilean ministry because so much was going on there. All the people from the Decapolis were coming and it was a great place to do ministry to reach people for the message of the kingdom.

But then there was Jericho, and as they told you last time, we had so much money poured into Jericho and all the money poured into Jericho for all the building projects, not in the ancient city of the Old Testament, which was not far from the city that Herod had rebuilt in Jericho, you had all kinds of taxation going on and the more you got close to that, which was a key trading route, the more money you were polling people and taxing people.

Now the ancient authorities say that when it comes to taxation it could be as high as 25% from Rome. Now think about that. They were already paying, if you know the Old Testament law, you had tithes that you paid, you had tithes for the temple, you even had a temple tax that Herod had tacked on top of that, you had the tri-annual welfare tithe, if you will. So you really had, if you looked at all of that, I mean, pushing 30% of Jewish taxes and then, if you got near places like Capernaum or Caesarea or Jericho, you had on top of that another 25%. I know we're talking a lot about taxes in the news today. But let's just think about that. That is as a lot of taxes being paid and this is for everyone.

Now the guys who are getting rich on this were the people that paid for the rights to do it, and then they had people who they interviewed and they would pay them for the rights to collect taxes in the streets and among the merchants. And the guys who were up at the top, and there were three of them in ancient Israel, they made all kinds of money. And here was one of them, Zacchaeus, a man who is short, which anthropologists say around the first century, he was probably right around 5 feet tall, based on the averages and all the rest of the, you know, research they do and they're guessing at that. So you had a short guy with a huge business card and a gigantic powerful position of the ancient Israeli IRS, if you will, it was really the Roman IRS, and here he is, hated by everyone. Why? Because, not only do you expect us to pay taxes to Israel, to the Jews, to the Sanhedrin, to the temple, you want us now to tack on as much as, it went anywhere from 5, 10, 15, all the way to 25%, and so you're taxing people, think about this, over 50% of their income, around Jericho. We hated this guy and he was giving it all, at least the part he didn't skim, giving it all back to Rome. We didn't want Rome in the picture. Matter of fact, if the Messiah is going to come, we can't wait for him to throw off the cloak of Rome. We want to be free, we want to be independent, we want to be autonomous.

So they said, this guy's bad. Everything about him is bad. He's against our nation, he's against, at the core, the loyalty to the children of Abraham, we do not like this guy, a sinner. You know, what I



think about this, what we have here, as I just said and talking about the son of Abraham, he is a turncoat to the sons of Abraham and yet he's called a son of Abraham in the most virtuous sense in a godly faith-filled, penitent heart. He's someone who is repentant, he's changed, he's living like Abraham in his heart because God's seeing this transformation that's taking place by the act of Grace of repentance in his life. All of this is happening, now think this through, to a guy who everyone thought is beyond the Grace of God. He's a turncoat. He's an enemy of the cross, we would say it that way. Like ISIS or like the new, you know, the new atheists of our day, or the head of the Freedom From Religion Foundation that attacks and litigates in court all day long against Christianity, those guys. These are the people beyond the Grace of God in their minds and yet, he's celebrating.

Coming to seek and save the lost. Well, here's one. Salvation has come to this house today. Number two on your outline, you ought to be glad that God's in the business of doing that. You should "Rejoice That Grace Covers The Penitent." What is Grace now? It is that gifted favor. He's on my team, he's mine, full acceptance, that gifted favor, that Grace covers the penitent. Now, there's no asterisk on that. The penitent who aren't really bad, the penitent who aren't beyond the reach of what culturally people would say is too bad to be saved. No. Listen, penitent? That's it, that's the key. If God works repentance in your heart, it doesn't matter who you are, you can be a thief on the cross, you can be a poor beggar in Chapter 18, you can be a Samaritan, as we learned earlier in Luke, it doesn't matter who you are. If you're penitent, Grace covers. Like that old hymn, "Grace that's greater than all my sins," it doesn't matter. Now, if you've ever had a time to look in the mirror of God's word and really have those expressions in your own heart of sorrow over your own sin, you may say to yourself at some point, even in your Christian life, "I can't believe that God's Grace would extend to me. I don't believe that God can still forgive me. How can he love me with my track record?" You can have those feelings.

But the key for you is to look for this thing called repentance, because Grace covers the penitent. Grace is greater than your sin. And the Bible makes that point clear, as clear as can be, by choosing notorious sinners to be saved, like we have here. A notorious sinner who even the Apostles were grumbling over, "I can't believe he's going to have lunch with that guy."

If you feel like you're beyond God's Grace, his gifted favor, you need to remember passages like this. And as I said, what you should look for if you want assurance, it's not the fact that you're better than the next guy, it should be whether or not you have genuine repentance active in your life. Now I don't have time to turn you there, but I'd like you to write it down or, better yet, on the back of the worksheet, I actually have you look at it. Second Corinthians Chapter 7 verses 8 through 11. Your second question for your small group discussions this week that will take place all throughout Orange County this week, I want you to spend time in this great passage talking about the sorrow that's involved that leads me like a portal, like a barrel and it shoots me into this thing called repentance. Sorrow that leads to repentance. And as I said in this question, you need to understand the difference between Godly grief, that's talked about there, that produces a repentance that leads to salvation, and the kind of worldly grief that doesn't, because people can feel bad about doing wrong. But we're talking about the work of God that leads to someone being saved because they are actually penitent. The Grace of God, salvation, it gets there through penitence, repentance, a heart that says I'm a sinner. And in that passage it'll talk about that grief, it'll talk about that pain. Paul says, "I don't feel good about making you grieve because I've convicted you of sin and spoken of your sin and confronted you about sin, but I sure am glad that that grief led you to repentance, because there would be no hope for you had it not."



Now let me say this as clearly as I can to a culture and in a time and in a generation that doesn't speak much about repentance. Have you repented? Are you sure of it? I'm not talking about you reciting a prayer, I'm not talking about you're walking an aisle, I not talking about lifting a hand, not talking about going to a crusade, I'm talking about you knowing you have repented. And even in that passage, the key demonstration of repentance is sorrow that leads you to repentance. We'll talk more about repentance in a minute, but it's that sorrow. Have you had that?

Talk about people who people thought were beyond the scope of God's Grace, beyond the sense that God would ever favor them. Think of the Assyrians as we were nearing that the kind of domination that they had on Israel and continued harassment they had in the ancient world, when Jonah gets sent there, and the key city was Nineveh, of course, the capital. And he goes there reluctantly because he doesn't even want to talk to them about God's values or God's judgment, just, "God judge them. They need to be judged."

You want to talk about grumbling that God would ever send someone to go deal with Israel, I mean, it was Jonah and Nineveh back in the day. And so here's Jonah and he comes and he speaks of the judgment that's coming and what happens. What happens? They repent. And you remember the signs of their repentance? Now, I'm not saying you got to have the signs of the repentance in the cultural way that they did, but they did some weird things there. They took, you've heard this word, sackcloth, do you know what sackcloth is? It's something you don't want to make, you know, your pajamas out of, let me tell you that. Very uncomfortable, dark, black, itchy, scratchy. You might use it for a sack for something you would carry around to the marketplace. But come on, I'm not going to dress in that. Why would you dress in that? Because one of things you did before you put on sackcloth, is you took your good clothes and you did what? Tore them. "Well, I don't know. I kind of like this shirt. I don't know if I'm going to tear it." No, no. Here's a penitent heart, "I hate the sin. I tear my clothes, I put on sackcloth." And then there's one more element in that passage. There's another thing. What do they put on their heads? Ashes. Have you cleaned out a fireplace, whether you're camping or in your house, you've got a wood burning fireplace, it's just soot and it's gross and it's dirty. You touch those ashes and it's all over your hands, you need a shower to clean up. And you're sitting there in really ugly, dark, dreary, mournful, uncomfortable clothing, and your hands and your head and your face are covered with this dirt. And you sit in those ashes and you think about your sin and you are sorrowful over it. Another thing they often did that we read about our Daily Bible Reading not long ago in Jeremiah. It says in Jeremiah 7:29, "He cut his hair." Imagine that? Cut your hair, dirt, ashes. It go so weird in Assyria that, when Jonah preached to them, they got ashes and sackcloth and put them on their animals. Right? I mean, it would be like us repenting and feeling so bad about our sin, we're going to go out and just cover our cars with dirt. Just terrible or sinful.

I wonder if you've had that encounter with your own sin. Some people want the benefits, to eat bread in the kingdom of God, and they think, "Isn't that great." No, most people when really hit with the demands of the Gospel, they push it back, they make excuses, but the Grace of God extends over the penitent. And those who are penitent, they are people who have experienced that sorrow for sin. If you have not had that encounter, which really is, internally, a crushing point of sorrow over your sin, I mean, I just wonder.

Now it's not enough just to be sorry for your sin as that passage will say and you will analyze in your small group time as you prepare for that discussion, but it starts with that. It's a sorrow that leads to repentance and that repentance that leads to life. Now, is God just wanting us to feel bad? No. But we feel bad so that we might feel the joy that comes after it. Psalm 30 verse 5, I know you



know this verse, "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes..." When? "In the morning." Weeping is part of the real joy that comes on the other side of penitence.

As Isaiah 35 said, verse 10, "The ransomed of the Lord are going to return to come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy will be upon their heads," not dust, not ashes, "they shall obtain gladness and joy, and all that sorrow and sighing will flee away." God wants you to be sorrowful about your sins so that you can be full of, as it says here, "joy and gladness" because it's all been forgiven. And that Grace that comes, that gifted favor from God, comes for those who are penitent.

And by the way, if you feel like others are beyond the reach of God's Grace, be very careful with that. Remember when Saul, aka Paul, got saved? He says it in an autobiographical way in First Timothy Chapter 1, I was the worst of all sinners because I was persecuting the church, I was signing off the death decrees of people in the church. And, he says, yet God did that so that I might be an example. Here are the words to it, "That I might display God's perfect patience as an example to those who would believe on Christ for eternal life."

So, be careful when you're looking at people and saying that, you know, "Come on, Richard Dawkins? Never. ISIS fighter? Never. Someone who hates Christianity at my work. Never." Don't say that. Be careful. As a matter of fact, Barnabas really earned his reputation, at least in the pages of The New Testament, because he was the first one to say, "Listen, this guy is penitent, then God's Grace covers him" and he reached out his hand and embraced him. We need to do that before they get saved because the only one that any hope for the Apostle Paul before he was the Apostle Paul and he was Saul, the persecutor of the church, was God. I'd like to be on God's side of this and have that optimism that the Grace of God can reach the worst of sinners. And you ought to rejoice that he's in the business of doing that, that Grace covers the penitent, whether you're a tax collector, one of three of the worst or whether you're just a church-goer, like Timothy learning Scripture from a child, avoiding the scars and all the trouble that others have. It doesn't matter, the Grace of God extends to them both as long as both of them are penitent.

Well, they grumbled about that, and I hate to include that but the text includes that, we got to make sure we check our hearts that we don't think anybody's beyond the Grace of God, that you don't ever look in the mirror and say, "Well, I'm not performing well enough this week, maybe I'm beyond the Grace of God." Penitence is what God is looking for, repentance is what God is looking for.

And if you want to see it on display? Start in verse 8, Luke 19 verse 8, Zacchaeus, apparently having this meal, he stands up and says to the Lord, "Listen, I've heard enough. I understand. I get it. Behold. Listen, now, I'm going to tell you, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor." Right? You think, well now, Jesus asked for all of it from the guy in Chapter 18. Well, he's got a plan for the other half. "If I've defrauded anyone of anything," and you can assume, for sure, he had, knowing all that we know about taxation in the first century by Jews to their fellow Jews for Rome, we understand he's a defrauder, "I will restore it fourfold." I restore it fourfold. Even the way that said is so definitive, it's a resolve. "I restore it fourfold." And Jesus says, look at that, here's the fruit of repentance right there. I got to tell you what's happened in your heart today, "Today salvation has come to this house since he," he tells the crowd, "is also a son of Abraham." Now that such a turnaround. You want to talk about a life rewired, a life redirected, a guy everyone said, "I can't believe he's going to have lunch with this man." And this man now, Jesus is declaring to be just like Abraham, the father of the godly and the faithful.

And he says, this is what this is all about, about me seeking guys out like this. The Son of Man has



come to seek and save the lost and the Spirit of God is involved in the same thing today. You and I need to be excited about that.

I'm going to put myself in the sandals of Zacchaeus now, and I'm going to say I want to be like that guy. The kind of renouncing of the old life and the kind of resolve for the new life, that kind of repentance, that's the fruit of repentance, that's what we see in the life of someone whose heart has been transformed. He's got a new outlook on life, reborn. I want to be like that. I want to do it as joyfully as he did it. That's why I put it this way, joyfully, because I can't imagine he's at all sad about losing his money in this case. He is joyfully living a new life and he's doing it for Christ who saved him and I want to do the same.

Number three, "Joyfully Live Your New Life For Christ" and those last two words are critical. This is not for your testimony, this is not for your small group, this is not for your pastor, this is not for your church, this is not for your wife, this is not for your kids, this is not for your coworkers, this is not for your community, it is for Christ. I want to live a new life for Christ. He saved me. And Grace like this, as the old hymn says, "Demands my life, my soul and my all." I'm ready to give it joyfully. Joyfully live your new life for Christ. I don't have time to get into the details of this but I'd certainly assign it as homework for you. First Thessalonians Chapter 1 verses 1 through 10 and let me see, did I prepare for that? No, man, question 6, I should have added to the discussion questions. It would be a great passage for you to study.

First Thessalonians 1 versus 2 through 10, and the Apostle Paul says look at this church coming out of their reception of the Gospel. You see and he starts in verse number 3 with three things. "The work of faith." That Greek word is the word that is used often times for strenuous, hard, sweaty kind of work. Now, you have faith, you have faith in Christ, and that faith in Christ that is part of this one response to the Gospel, this penitent faith, that faith has produced all this work in your life. And then he says a "labor of love." You're laboring your heart out because you love. It doesn't give us the object of that, we assume they love God, and certainly if you love God, you going to love God's people, but they're laboring, they're sacrificing just like Zacchaeus did. And then "steadfastness." That's not a word we use very often, it's the word "hupomene". If you've been around here, we talk about hupomene, it's such a great word, that persevering, enduring kind of "I'm going to stick with it, I'm not going to stop, it may get hard, it may be tiring, but I'm gonna go the extra mile, extra hour, extra dollar. I'm going to do all of that without giving up." And in this text he says, it's a steadfastness because you have, here it comes, "hope in the Lord Jesus Christ."

And this is the assurance they have because I'm seeing this come out of your life, just like Zacchaeus could be assured that his life was right with God because of the change in his life. He says, "We know brothers," verse four, "that you are loved by God and that he has chosen you because our Gospel came to you not in word only," you didn't shake my hand at the door, you didn't nod your hand, and you didn't say, "nice sermon, Paul." No, "It came in power," it changed you, "power in the Holy Spirit and with," here comes, "full conviction." Like sorrow over sin. Like tears for the fact that you've wronged the God who made you.

And he says, our example, you saw our example and you followed it and you received the word, it didn't matter how hard it got, "you did it in much affliction," and yet you had "joy in the Holy Spirit." Just like, I can only assume, Zacchaeus happily was going to serve God with the rest of his life. "So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

Just like I was an example, you became an example to others. "For not only is the word of God



sounded forth from you," you not only have told the story to other people in Macedonia and Achaia, "but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so we have no need to say anything, for they themselves," people watching your life, "they report what kind of reception the Gospel had among you." When we preach to you they know that you receive it. Why? "Because you," here's our concept, "you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

What was the idol in Zacchaeus' life? Well, he uses the word defrauded. People defraud people, they do underhanded things at work to make more money because they love money, they're greedy.

And he repents of all of that. Just like the Thessalonians had their own things they repented of, they turned to God from whatever their idols were. And by the way, if you want to know the categories for idols, and we've talked about this passage, but let's look at it again in our own minds. In First John 2 it talks about three things the world's all about: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life. Lust of the flesh - things that feel good. I'm all about pleasure. I want to feel good. The lust of the eyes - I want things to look good. I want everything to be attractive and beautiful around me. And then, the boastful pride of life - I want people to recognize me, I want to be important. Pleasure, beauty and importance, recognition. Those are the things everyone lives for and they do it in a temporal sense for the here and now. Gods says, "I'd like to give you all those things. I'd like to give you real pleasure, I'd like to give you real beauty and I'd like to give you real importance and significance, but it's in an economy called the kingdom.

But as it is, everyone's busy about trying to get those things in this life. That's so short sighted because those things are all from the world and those things are all passing away but "The one who does the will of God he," do you know that passage, "abides forever." That's repentance, turning from things that don't really matter that we're so fixated on in this life. I want to feel good and want things to look good, I want to be important, I want to be significant, I want to be recognized, I want to be respected. All those things become our idols and the Thessalonians turned from those, just like Zacchaeus was all about all those things that underline the defrauding at his work place, all the greed in his heart. "And they turned," like Zacchaeus turned, "to wait for his Son from heaven." We can't wait for the coming kingdom to "eat bread in the kingdom" as it says in Luke. "Whom God raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us..." Now here's really why we are weeping over sin, because when it comes with judgment, those realities deliver us, Christ himself "delivers us from the wrath that is to come."

Live a new life in Christ. If you're a Christian, we do that joyfully. It demands our life, our soul, our all. We realize that Grace that he's given us, it instructs us to live that way.

I want you to think about your repentance. It's obviously going to include sorrow for sin. But then, you're going to come out of that with a, here are two good words. You want the two sides of repentance? "Renouncing" and "resolving."

Renouncing. I'm done with that and I'm all about this. Zacchaeus renounced his greed and now he's all about giving to the poor. What is that? Generosity. He renounces the greed and now he's all about resolving to be generous. He's renouncing his underhanded ways at work, the unscrupulous nature of his work ethic, and he says, "I'm done with cutting corners, I'm done with defrauding people and now I'm all about making it right." And he says, "I'm going to pay them back," what does he say, what's the percentage? Fourfold.

Now if you get caught in the Old Testament stealing from your neighbor, you'd be brought before



the judges, the leaders, the old guys in the community, and they would adjudicate a restitution process and you'd have to bring restitution to those who you ripped off. And the restitution of the Old Testament was you were to make them completely whole with everything that you stole, plus a fifth, plus 20%. Now think about 20%, that's something. He's going, what? 400%, I'm going to pay them back. Talk about zeal. He's not looking to say, "What is the minimum I have to do for Christ this week?" Talk about the extra mile, extra dollar, extra hour, I just want to make it right. I've renounced my wrong and I'm now resolving to do right.

Now, some of you were afraid of that. You want to talk about Grace, you want to talk about the Spirit and I'm all into those things, I understand that, but Jesus doesn't say, "Would you stop being so works focused? Today salvation has come to this house." Why? Because real faith, real repentance, it produces a renouncing of your sin and a resolve to do what's right. Renouncing and resolve. I just wonder what are the things that..., just right now, think in your mind. If I was sitting in your front room on your sofa with my feet up on your coffee table and I said, "Let's talk about this. Tell me the things you renounced when you came to Christ and the things you've resolved to do. I just want you tell me some of those things." And by the way, as you've stumbled along the way in your process and growth of sanctification, tell me about that renouncing and that resolving. What have you renounced and what have you resolved? "Well, I don't do much of that because, you know, I'll fail and I don't want to make promises I can't keep.

Listen, I understand we've got to be very careful about the things we say to God. Sometimes we got to let our words be few as Ecclesiastes says, when I come and vow before God. But, you know, real repentant hearts, it's a fuel that drives them to renounce the sin and to resolve to do the right. I just wonder, is that a pattern of your Christian life? Even the word repent, by the way, is used more often for Christians than it is for non-Christians. Even though the Christian life starts with it, it is the key to getting right with God.

But let's just get specific. Don't just say, "Yeah, I repent of my sins. I repented of my sins when I became a Christian." What have you renounced and what have you resolved? This is key, even though if we have repented. And by the way, those who wonder, "What should I do, what kind of restitution should I make, how should I make the wrongs right?" Ephesians Chapter 5 may be helpful in this regard. It's going involve your prayer life. It says in verse 8, "For at one time you were darkness, but now you're light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light," consistent things like this, "what is good, what is right and what is true." There are some targets, but then he says, listen, you got to pray about this, you got to figure this out, "Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." Do you think Zacchaeus couldn't have had that experience as he looked into the brown eyes of Christ? He wants to know what's going to please him right now. Here's someone who is saying, your justified, your sins are forgiven. We know that was part of it, it had to be, that's constantly what Jesus is saying to those who get saved, who have salvation, and Zacchaeus looks into this one who's just forgiven him and he says, "What's going to please him?" Again, I'm going to talk about what you've renounced and what you've resolved to do as a response to God's Grace in your life, the Grace of God.

I didn't read it, but Titus Chapter 2, "The Grace of God instructs us, it trains us to renounce ungodliness." Have you renounced anything this week? "And all those worldly passions, and to live," here's the result, "self-controlled, upright, godly lives in the present age." That's Titus, Chapter 2 verses 11 and 12. The key is repentance. Oh yes, it involves sorrow and some tears but nothing could be more satisfying, nothing causes more profound joy than making sure in your life you have repented of your sins. For the joy of salvation is knowing your sins are fully forgiven, that



you have full acceptance with God, the God of the Bible, the real God that is.

He calls him a son of Abraham. Let's just close with this thought. Because Abraham showed his repentance and faith, didn't he? How did he show that? By withholding nothing from God that God would ask. You want to talk about who was in charge of Abraham's life? Everyone knew it, based on Genesis 22. He took the thing he loved the most, like the rich young ruler in Chapter 18 of Luke, who loved his money, and here God says, "Give me that." Why? So he could torture him? No. I just want to make this clear. It was called a time of testing for Abraham. "Do you have faith in me? Do you trust me? Or is your son your idol? Let's talk about your son, take your only son, the son that you love and I want you to take him to Mount Mariah. We're going to sacrifice him there," which made absolutely no sense to anyone, including Abraham I'm sure, other than the clarity that God had asked him to do it.

Did it make any sense that the rich young ruler had all these investments, all this business, and God says, "I want you to give it away?" It was clear to Abraham what God was asking. It didn't make any sense on paper. And he does it.

And he says, "God, I love my son but I don't love my son more than you, I love you first and foremost." Zacchaeus loved his job I'm sure, loved the power that came with it, loved the very unique nature of him climbing that ladder in Rome and being able to have all this exercised authority over his fellow Israelites, and yet he had all that money amassed and said, "I don't care about that anymore. I'm going to do what's right. And I know to do what's right, it's going to cost me those things and it doesn't matter. I'm joyfully ready to go beyond a 20% restitution to a 400% restitution. Happy to do it."

Abraham proved that he would withhold nothing. We call it ATAPAT around here: AnyThing, AnyPlace, AnyTime. Zacchaeus once loved his life on this earth so much that he disregarded God. But now, like Abraham, there was nothing in this world he wouldn't withhold from God. "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost and now I'm found, was blind and now I see." Here he is, found, seeing, getting right with the living God.

Abraham knew what the key was. And I'm talking now, not about the Abraham of Genesis 22, I'm talking about Abraham our 16th president. Thirty-nine hundred years after the Abraham of the Bible, his namesake, this new Abraham, who led our country, picked a day on the calendar and he said this is going to be the day we remember the indispensable key. In 1863, he mapped out the path for all American citizens to sublime joy. You not going to get to hear speeches like this these days, but listen to that part of this proclamation from 1863 regarding repentance.

He says to his fellow Americans, "It is our duty to confess our sins and our transgressions, in humble sorrow." Can you imagine? "Yet with assure hope that genuine repentance will lead to God's mercy and his pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations," and people I might add, "only are blessed whose God is the Lord."

Want to get right with the living God? Repentance is the key. Nothing better than being made right with God. Now, you're not going to hear these kinds of political speeches this week on Fox News, you understand.

But listen to it again. "It is our duty to confess our sins and transgressions, in humble sorrow, yet



with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize this sublime truth announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history that those nations," and people, "only are blessed," blessed, that's a word of happiness, of joy, of satisfaction, "whose God is the Lord.

And you may think God is your Lord, but if you haven't repented, he is not. He is not. Our nation has no interest in such things today, but the promise of that transaction remains for us and our children. I hope it is your passion to make sure this is a reality in your life and it is your passion to see that all those in your life hear the message of repentance. "Christ came, according to Scripture, he suffered, he died, he rose on the third day from the dead, that forgiveness that is granted by repentance, that repentance for the forgiveness of sins might be proclaimed to all the nations.

I hope this has been an assuring time for your heart if you're a Christian and if you're not a Christian, that God is drawing you to the place of repentance. No aisles to walk, as I often say, there's no hands to raise, no cards to fill out, it's you and God, one on one, saying, "God, I give up. You got me. I repent." There might be a tear, there might be some sorrow that clearly overwhelms your heart because you know you've sinned against God. But you accept his forgiveness because he said, "If you confess your sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness." Blessed are those whose sins are forgiven and his transgressions are cancelled. That's the call of the Gospel and I hope that's a cause for rejoicing in your heart.

Let's pray. God, a strange juxtaposition and contrast of concepts here: repentance, penitence, sin. And yet all these words, that we are rejoicing, we're glad, we're joyful, because we know, as Abraham Lincoln so eloquently expressed so long ago, that we have the sublime truth that we can be right with you. Pardon and mercy can be ours if we respond rightly to our duty to confess our sins in humble sorrow, and that genuine repentance will bring us mercy and pardon.

God make that a reality for everyone in this room and I mean that. It's a huge request, God, but I pray that there wouldn't be anyone hearing my voice right now on the radio or in this room, who is not today, like Zacchaeus, ready to say, "I'm yours. I'm a sinner. I admit it. I've done wrong and I admit it. I'm ready to live for you." Let that be the joyful resolve of everyone who renounces their old way. And as Second Corinthians Chapter 5 says, that we may no longer live for ourselves but for you. For you, Christ, specifically, who died for us and rose again.

God we have much joy to be gained in a life like that instead of playing around with the priorities of this world. It doesn't mean we quit our jobs, doesn't mean we all become pastors or missionaries, but it means we recognize that first things come first in our lives, to seek first the kingdom, God's righteousness, knowing you'll take care of all the other things the rest of the world is chasing after. So make our priorities what they ought to be. Thanks for this tune-up here in this passage as we've received it this morning. Let it motivate us and fueled our Christian life this week.

In Jesus name, amen.