

THE IMPORTANCE OF REPENTANCE

Bible Reading - Matthew chapter 4 verses 12 – 25 (Amplified Bible).

'Now when Jesus heard that John [the Baptist] had been arrested and put in prison, He left for Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, He went and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the country of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

***"THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI,
BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE [in the district] OF THE GENTILES—***

***"THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING (living) IN [spiritual] DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT,
AND FOR THOSE WHO WERE SITTING (living) IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF [spiritual and moral] DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT HAS DAWNED."***

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent [change your inner self—your old way of thinking, regret past sins, live your life in a way that proves repentance; seek God's purpose for your life], for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He noticed two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He said to them, "Follow Me [as My disciples, accepting Me as your Master and Teacher and walking the same path of life that I walk], and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed Him [becoming His disciples, believing and trusting in Him and following His example].

And going on [further] from there He noticed two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets; and He called them [to follow Him as His disciples]. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him [becoming His disciples, believing and trusting in Him and following His example].

And He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news (gospel) of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people [demonstrating and revealing that He was indeed the promised Messiah].

So the news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were sick, those suffering with various diseases and pains, those under the power of demons, and epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. ²⁵ Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and the other side of the Jordan.'

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.

Jesus then meets John who baptises Him; and that shows 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?

There are **five** things I would like to share with you...

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 And leaving Nazareth, He went and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the country of Zebulun and Naphtali. ¹⁴ *This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:*

¹⁵ "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI,
BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE [in the district] OF THE GENTILES—

¹⁶ "THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING (living) IN [spiritual] DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT,
AND FOR THOSE WHO WERE SITTING (living) IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF [spiritual and moral] DEATH,
UPON THEM A LIGHT HAS DAWNED."

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, preparing and 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 us. He loves us all so much!

The second thing I found interesting was what Jesus preached!

So, in verse 17 we read:

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent [change your inner self—your old way of thinking, regret past sins, live your life in a way that proves repentance; seek God's purpose for your life], for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

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 verse 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 your ticket into 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 verse 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 IOW, that we might see thousands saved!!

Returning to Scripture we find a few years later in Acts 21 verse 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.

So, some rhetorical questions for you...

Have you repented of your sins?

Have you turned to God?

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

I've said before that it is the job of the preacher to preach the truth. Not my truth, but God's Truth, and not to water it down.

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 (chapter 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 Jesus came to 'bring life that you might live it to the full'! Amen!

Paul tells us straight, in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 and 9 that we won't get to Heaven by our good deeds. According to the NLT, that scripture 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 is 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 other verses of the many that we can read, John 3 verse 16 and Acts 4 verse 12 – they both tell us salvation is possible only through Jesus. 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, verses 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 confess and repent?

To confess means to admit to God something we did or said 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 have been doing the wrong thing, going the wrong way.

'I have been 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' ...

Let me ask you to ponder some more questions...

Have you repented?

Have you turned to God?

Do you confess and 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.

You may be thinking "I've never murdered anybody or dealt in drugs," but as the Bible says, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23) and in Song of Solomon 2:15, 'it is the little foxes that spoil the vine', meaning it is the small sins we carry out that separate us from God.

When Jesus was crucified, the thief next to him on the Cross turned to Christ and was saved! Our sins do not condemn us, provided we repent. In John chapter 3 verse 17 it 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 me read it again

¹⁸ As Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He noticed two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And He said to them, "Follow Me [as My disciples, accepting Me as your Master and Teacher and walking the same path of life that I walk], and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him [becoming His disciples, believing and trusting in Him and following His example]. ²¹ And going on [further] from there He noticed two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets; and He called them [to follow Him as His disciples]. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him [becoming His disciples, believing and trusting in Him and following His example].

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' 12 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 may not want us all to become church leaders, but He wants to enable us all to fulfil His wonderful purpose for our lives, however small that role might appear to be.

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

My fourth point is that Jesus taught the people:

In verse 23 it says: ***‘And He went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news (gospel) of 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 in our current culture, where any mention of Christianity is more or less banned from Schools, they may not learn it anywhere else!

My final point is: Jesus healed.

The reading concludes with:

‘...and (He healed) every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people [demonstrating and revealing that He was indeed the promised Messiah].’

²⁴ So the news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were sick, those suffering with various diseases and pains, those under the power of demons, and epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them.

²⁵ Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and the other side of the Jordan.’

Do you need healing? If you would like prayer for healing (or anything else), Michele and I would be very happy to pray for you after the service.

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.

Now Michele and I are very aware that many believers are not instantly healed every time they get unwell, despite the well-intentioned prayers of fellow-Christians. It's true that sometimes lack of healing can be due to unbelief, or ongoing sin in people's lives; but there are other reasons too and Michele has just completed the writing of her fourth book, which will be available in about 6 weeks' time called 'When Healing Doesn't Happen – A life lived for God through the journey of suffering'.

She has struggled with her health all her life and has sought the Lord for healing for **all** her ailments, for the past 27 years since she gave her life to Christ in 1992. For whatever the Lord's reasons, He has not healed her of these although He **has** healed her of many other things. She knows that God has a purpose for her suffering and is using her in the midst of it. This book is the story of her life.

I am going to close now but before we sing our final hymn and chat together over refreshments, I want to 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 we find ourselves struggling with - and turn back to God, to receive His cleansing forgiveness and restoration.

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:

PRAYER

Father it seems every day I do something or say something or think something I shouldn't. I'm really sorry and confess these things to you. Please forgive me. Help me to turn around. I want my focus to shift from me back to you. To switch from doing things my way to Your way. I want to know you more deeply. I want to follow you more closely. I invite you into my life more fully. Take over my entire life. Cleanse and refine away from me the things in my life that I struggle with and those parts of my life that are not pleasing to You.

Day by day, make me more like you Lord.

Amen!

Copyright Chris Neal April 2019