

Repentance

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- [0 : 0 0] When I was a teenager, I don't know, 12, 13, somewhere around there, I had a very bad week in which I kept breaking things.
- So we had a garage with a big tall stand-up freezer in it. The freezer was stuffed to the gills with fish, pun intended, with like quarts of blueberries that we had picked, lots and lots of like an abundance of food.
- And one evening, I'd gone out to the freezer to get something, left the door open all night long, so that the freezer died and all of the blueberry juice poured out and all of the garage smelled like fish.
- Later that day, I had the task of mowing the yard, and so I filled up the mower with what I thought was gasoline. But it was not gasoline, it was kerosene.
- And when you put kerosene in a mower, it tends to make blowing up sounds and not work anymore. Later that week, we had a fish tank that we had a big long process for changing out the water, taking the fish out, changing out the water, cleaning it, putting the fish back in, re-acclimating them to the water.
- [1 : 1 3] And when I had done that, I had left the heater on the tank on, so that when it was empty, the heater shattered all the glass of the aquarium. And so after each occasion, I would go to my parents, or my parents would come to me rather upset, and I would say, I'm sorry about the freezer.
- And then I would go and fill up the mower with kerosene, and it would not work anymore. And so I would say, I'm sorry about the mower. And then the same thing happened with the aquarium. I'm sorry about the aquarium.
- And eventually, my parents had to sit me down and say, look, I'm sorry just isn't good enough anymore. You have to say something beyond I'm sorry. You also have to say, how can I help?
- How can I fix what is broken? And what can I do to make sure that this stops happening? We've been on a series for the past few weeks about race and justice.
- And we've been using LaTosha Morrison's framework that she gives in the book, Be the Bridge, about how the church can be a place of racial justice and racial reconciliation.
- [2 : 2 1] And we've talked about the mistakes that often white moderate churches can make, where they think that there is simply acknowledgement, and you immediately jump into reconciliation.
- But what Morrison is putting forward in a biblical model is that, no, there are some steps in between. And so we talked about awareness of the truth, that you just have to have an awareness of what even is wrong to even begin the steps towards, excuse me, reconciliation.
- You have acknowledgement that you played some role in that, and are lamenting that there are things so broken. You have grief and shame, these feelings that can overwhelm us as we think about all of the ways that we have been involved in or complicit in racist systems in our country or in our neighborhood, or how we bought our house, or what our education was or was not like.

And if we're involved in colorism, or white supremacy, or anti-blackness, or anti-indigeneity, all of these different ways, then we can just feel this heaping amount of shame, and we can be frozen and paralyzed by it.

We talked about confession. The idea that you need to speak the words out loud, that this isn't just an internal thing that you think about and ruminate on, but you actually need to say it.

[3 : 43] And, you know, our guest speaker, Anna Chelsea, she attempted to guide us through an exercise of confession, which stayed silent, because it's hard to put words on our lips admitting that we were wrong.

Last week, in the park, we had a baptism, and Anselm preached on forgiveness, and the complicatedness of forgiveness, because there's forgiveness in the sense of, I am releasing you from affecting my emotional state.

I forgive you, meaning I'm not going to give you control to make, to settle my emotions. But there's also forgiveness in the sense of, what you did is wrong, and it needs repair, and in order for there to be forgiveness, there needs to be recognition of that, and for you to change your mind, and do something different.

And so, today, we're talking about repentance. That it's not just about saying the words, I'm sorry. It's not just about being forgiven, and then saying, okay, forget about it.

It's about actually changing our mind, and our actions, and what we do, that says that we are repentant. Confession says, I did something wrong, and I'm sorry, and that's a necessary step, particularly when we talk about race, and racial justice here in the United States.

[5 : 09] But repentance is saying, how can I help repair what's broken, and what's wrong? Confession is about recognizing our sins, and repentance is taking action about it.

Confession without repentance repentance is fruitless, because repentance is about turning around, about making sometimes a small change, and sometimes about making a complete about face, a 180 turn.

There's this passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 7, that I feel like so speaks to what we're dealing with as a nation, when it comes to these issues.

Paul writes this. He says, godly sadness, some translations say godly sorrow, produces a changed heart, and a life that leads to salvation, and leads to no regrets.

There's sorrow under the influence of the world, Paul writes, and that produces death. But look at what this experience of godly sorrow, godly sadness, has produced in you.

[6 : 22] And then he gives this like pattern, this bullet point list almost. Number one, such enthusiasm, Paul writes. And I can relate to this.

I remember as an earlier adult in my 20s, as I began the journey of wokeness, or whatever, of recognizing the awareness of the truth, that there were things broken in our nation, of when it came to race, and my role in it, of like, yes, I am enthusiastic about learning about this, because there's something that needs to be done.

Let's do something. And then Paul says, number two, a desire to clear yourselves. And I put in my notes, parentheses, denial. Yes, yes, there is something that needs to be done, about racial justice in America.

There are sins in our nation's history, and maybe even right now, but it's not me. Geez, absolutely not. Couldn't be. Paul continues. Look at this experience of godly sorrow, enthusiasm, a desire to clear yourselves.

Number three, such indignation. And I don't know what Paul had in mind. Indignation that you might call me to account on the things that I have done, and the things I have left undone.

[7 : 36] Indignation at what evil, and harm, and brokenness, has been brought upon my brothers and sisters of color. Then he continues, what alarm, and what concern, and then what readiness to see justice done.

And so there's this godly sorrow that Paul writes about that leads us almost through, like, these stages of grief, of enthusiasm, to denial, to alarm, and concern, and then a sense of readiness.

Let's make sure that justice is done. Contrast the actions of the nation of Canada or South Africa with our own.

Canada's government and prime ministers, they have had formal apologies and recognitions from the prime minister to their parliament about the variety of corporate sins that Canada has been a part of.

South Africa did this with apartheid as well. In Canada's case, it was about forcing native children into residential schools, coercively assimilating them into mainstream, read, white culture.

[8 : 56] Killing hundreds. And their apologies, their statements, say things like, it was wrong. Our government did this. It caused great harm.

We're sorry. And then they went beyond that, beyond just the confession stage, but they established truth and reconciliation commissions. They documented the historical impact of these schools, parentheses, it wasn't good.

And then they set up a system of reparations to rectify their wrongs. Now, was it a perfect system? Is there still more work to be done? Of course there is.

But they at least made some steps. Now, contrast that to our nation, the United States, has not even come close to anything like this. In 2008, the House and the Senate both passed separate resolutions that were apologies for slavery and Jim Crow.

But in an attempt to have a joint resolution, they couldn't do it. And there has been no sitting president that has ever given a formal apology. We, as a nation, as a society, we barely confessed, much less repented, or began the work of repair for the sins of white supremacy in our country.

[10 : 13] In fact, our country seems even unsure about step one, being aware of the truth. Despite headlines about critical race theory, which, parentheses again, if your kid's being taught CRT, congratulations, your kid is in law school.

But that aside, the question on the table is about whether or not we can even tell the truth about ourselves and our history. In 2 Kings chapter 22 and 23, and I preached on this a few weeks ago, but we briefly looked at the story of King Josiah, who rediscovered the written record of God's law, probably an early version of the book of Deuteronomy, that was basically just collecting dust in the temple.

And as they were doing some restoration of the temple, they came across it, they showed it to the king, the king read it, ripped his robes out of a sense of lament, brought it to the prophetess, hold up, because when you want to know what God says, you ask a woman, and Huldah says, your nation has sinned, and there are going to be consequences.

But if you take steps to repair what is wrong, then there will be mercy for you. And so, this is what it says, this is 2 Kings 23, the king, Josiah, commanded the high priest to remove from the Lord's temple all the religious objects made for these false gods, Baal, Asherah, and the stars.

And so, for years, generations, God's temple, that David had commissioned, Solomon had built, and then for decades, it had been filled, not with objects of worship for Yahweh, for God, but for other gods, for false gods, for idols.

[12 : 00] So the king burned them outside of Jerusalem in the Kidron fields. He got rid of the pagan priests. Turns out that when you have a recognition of something being wrong, some people need to lose their jobs.

He removed the Asherah idol. He takes it to the Kidron Valley. He burns it, grinds it to dust, and then throws dust in the graveyard. He is trying to make a point.

Verse 10, says King Josiah destroys this idol named Topheth in the Ben-Hinnom Valley so that no one could burn their child alive anymore in honor of a god named Molech.

And so this people of God, this people that God had commissioned to be a light to the world, to show the world what it was like when God set things right for your society, these people instead had filled the temple with foreign and pagan idols and gods, and as a result of that, were trying to appease these angry, temperamental gods by sacrificing their kids.

So Josiah hears the word of the Lord, takes action, repents, fires some people, burns down idols, and takes the place where you were supposed to sacrifice your child and wrecks it.

[13 : 16] Now, aside, Ben-Hinnom is this place of child sacrifice where you take your children, you would burn them alive. And this was not done to worship Yahweh.

It says in the book of Ezekiel that such a thing would never cross God's mind to sacrifice children like this. It was an act of worship for these false gods. So Josiah attempts to put a stop to this.

After he dies, it starts over again. Because he recognized what burning children alive is. It's bad. Didn't know if you knew that. There's your main point for today.

Now, Ben-Hinnom, that's Aramaic or Hebrew. In the Greek, it's a word called Gehenna, which in modern translations in the New Testament is often translated as hell.

Jesus says that there will be those who are taken to Gehenna. For there's weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, I want you to think about this. If you have an image of God sending people to hell to burn them alive forever, then I would suggest that you're probably worshiping a God that's more in line with the false gods that Josiah is trying to destroy than of Yahweh God, the one true God who is trying to put that whole burning kids alive thing to an end.

[14 : 40] Just a thought. Now, what does any of this have to do with race and justice? Josiah heard the word of the Lord and took action to prevent not just like bad religious rituals, but a religion, a form of belief and faith that was actively harming people, that was supporting economic oppression, that was keeping the rich rich and the poor poor, and that at its very worst was killing kids to keep the gods happy.

I think in our case, we are being presented with an awareness of the truth. That is the apocalypse that is coming upon us today.

Apocalypse, a word that means a revealing, a showing, an uncovering of what is true. And so as we come across this apocalypse as a nation, that things are just as bad as people of color have told us that they've been for a long, long time now, we have a chance to respond do we respond defensively?

Well, no, it's actually not that bad. Let me tell you why. Do we respond by leaning in and say, tell me more? Anything that reeks of white supremacy and racism, anything that's built on the back of slavery or Jim Crow or segregation or redlining, any wealth that has been made by making sure that somebody else could never get wealthy, it needs to be taken out like the idols to the valley to be burned and ground into dust and thrown into the graveyard, can I have an amen?

In Ephesians chapter 2, Paul writes this about repentance. It says, God is rich in mercy.

[16 : 34] He brought us to life with Christ while we were dead as a result of the things that we did wrong through that confession.

And God did this because of the great love that he has for us. If you have an image of your mind of a God that's angry at you, who needed to beat up Jesus in order to forgive you, it's not the God that Jesus shows us.

It's not the God of the Bible. No, God's rich in mercy. He brings us to life in Christ because of his great love for us. We are saved by God's grace. And God raised us up and seated us in the heavens with Christ Jesus.

There's a refrain throughout the Bible that what is true of Jesus is true of you. We are seated in the heavens with Jesus and God did this to show future generations the greatness of his grace by the goodness that God has shown us in Christ Jesus.

were those future generations by the way. I had a pastor, my former pastor today, I was watching his sermon this morning and he was bringing up what was going on in Afghanistan, the tragedy that's ensuing there.

[17 : 56] And there, Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous places to be if you are a Christian. One of the most persecuted places and it's very difficult to get a grasp on how many Christians there are there just because it's hard to get any sort of information out of there.

But there is a story that came out either this morning or yesterday of basically Taliban leaders sending threats to underground house church leaders saying, we know who you are, we know where you live, and we're coming for you.

And the house church leaders responded, we're not going anywhere. And I think of that with what is written here.

God did this to show future generations the greatness of his grace by the goodness that God has shown us in Christ Jesus. Those future generations who are currently hiding, fearing for their lives, they saw what God did in Jesus and they're saying, we're not going anywhere.

You're saved by God's grace, Paul continues, because of his faithfulness. The salvation is God's gift. It's not something that you possessed. It's not something that you did that you can be proud of.

[19 : 13] Instead, we are God's accomplishment. We're created in Christ Jesus to do good things and God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

Repentance is about a change of direction, not merely about checking the right box of beliefs, not merely about saying a prayer when we do communion, I confess that I have sinned against you and thought, word and deed about what I have done, what I have left undone, and mumbling it with all of our hearts, but rather, it's about lives that are changed, that are willing to stand in the face of oppression and say, we ain't moving.

It's about lives that are changed that are willing to be confronted by the truth and say, all right, how do we repair this?

And by the way, I probably shouldn't be the one in charge of the repair. You know best, I'll listen to you. Repentance is not just about us tallying up good deeds either so we can feel better about ourselves.

It's God's accomplishment in us. It's God's spirit alive and working in us. And so, if we, as the church, have any hope, have any ability, have any inkling to be involved in what God is up to, we best not be thinking that we can do it by ourselves, but rather, we best be believing that we can only do it by submission to God's spirit, by submission to the person and the way and the life of Jesus and a willingness to say, I surrender it all to you, God, I will do what you ask.

[20 : 54] That's what repentance is about. And if we have any hope of making any forward progress on the restoration that needs to happen in our neighborhoods and our communities and our cities and our nation when it comes to our original sin of white supremacy, it's going to require an utter dependence on the way of Christ.

Next week, Heidi's going to share with us some of the steps that we can be taking as we repent, as we change direction, what is it that we might be asked to do?

I encourage you to come back next week and hear that. Would you pray with me? God of love, we also know that you are a God of justice and that your love has meaning because you care for us and you desire good things for your children and that means that you want to put an end to those who would cause your children harm.

And so, God, I confess for the myriad of times that I have harmed your world, your church, and your people.

And God, I want to be the kind of person who doesn't just keep breaking things and keep saying I'm sorry and hope that's good enough. I want to be the kind of person who actually changes my life and reorders my life around your justice.

[22 : 35] So, God, would you create a godly sorrow in me? God, I pray that you would create a godly sorrow in this congregation and this people. God, that we might have the wounds of repentance, that our bones might be broken, that they might be set again stronger and more capable to follow you, God.

God, may we be known as a church that was willing to admit our mistakes, to risk new things, and to create heaven on earth.