

The Joy of Repentance

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 15th of August 2004. The preacher is Peter Adam.

His sermon is entitled, The Joy of Repentance. It is taken from 2 Corinthians 7, verses 2 to 16.

O gracious God, we wait on you now. Please speak to each heart and life, and to the heart and life of this church.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, it's a great delight to be with you this morning. I was told I was preaching on the joy of repentance from 2 Corinthians 7, and I'm very pleased to do so.

I remember that actually the second sermon I ever preached was on 2 Corinthians 7, on the joy of repentance. That was back in 1967. I've still got the notes, but this is an entirely new sermon, you'll be pleased to know.

[1 : 0 7] A fresh sermon. Well, please open your Bibles at page 941, because I want you to learn a memory verse for the day. Page 941.

The memory verse is about two kinds of grief. Godly grief and worldly grief.

Let me read it to you. 2 Corinthians 7, verse 10. Would you please say those words with me?

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.

Let me ask you a question. What does godly grief produce? Godly grief produces repentance.

[2 : 1 6] Where does that lead to? Salvation and no regrets. What does worldly grief produce? I wonder how long is it since you've said these immortal words, I am sorry, I have made a mistake.

Very simple words, aren't they? I am sorry, I have made a mistake. If you're married, ask your husband or your wife after church this morning, how long, dear, is it since I said, I'm sorry, I have made a mistake?

They might say, 1942. Or they might say, last Tuesday. Actually, one of the best ways to keep your marriage in good order is to say, at least once a week, even if it's not strictly necessary, I'm sorry, I made a mistake.

It's actually a very good way to train children, isn't it? They need to say, sometimes, sometimes, I'm sorry, I made a mistake.

And the best way children learn to say, I'm sorry, I made a mistake, is if you occasionally say, I'm sorry, I made a mistake.

[3 : 5 6] When we say, I'm sorry, I made a mistake, that is godly grief that produces repentance, that leads to salvation and brings no regret.

It's when we refuse to say, I'm sorry, I made a mistake, that we have worldly grief that produces death.

Look how Paul characterises godly grief in verses 9 to 11. He says, Godly grief is appropriate. I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because your grief led to repentance, for you felt a godly grief, so that you were not harmed in any way by us.

You might remember the Corinthian church has been a bit lax, a bit weak. It hasn't recognised that one of its members has made a mistake. In fact, it's been rejoicing in the fact that one of its members has made a mistake.

And Paul has been so concerned about this, that he's written a very firm letter, and also sent Titus to bring the message of the letter home. All Paul wants is for the church at Corinth to say, we have made a mistake, we are sorry.

[5 : 13] And he says, your sorrow now, your godly grief, is appropriate. Furthermore, in verse 9, it's not harmed, you're not harmed in any way. So when it's godly grief, that doesn't harm us, though as he's about to point out, worldly grief produces death, godly grief doesn't harm us.

Godly grief, next in verse 10, is directed towards God. It's towards God grief. That is, it's grief which is living closely with God, honestly before God. I wonder, by the way, when was the last time you confessed a specific sin to God?

The last time you said to God, well today, God, I lost my temper, please forgive me. Or today, I ignored someone, please forgive me.

Or today, I gossiped, please forgive me. Or today, I told a lie, please forgive me. I hope you're in the custom of saying to God, please forgive me, unless it is that you actually lead a perfect life.

Anybody here, just raise your hand if you do lead a perfect life, would you? Not many hands raised, a couple at the back there, but I don't believe you for a moment, you're just pretending.

[6 : 34] None of us live a perfect life, isn't that true? So that means that all of us must have to say, at least once a week, if not, in my case, 55 times a day, God, I have sinned, I am sorry, please forgive me.

And what's the practical outcome of godly grief? Well, Paul shows what it is in verse 11. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what zeal, what punishment.

At every point, you've proved yourself guiltless in the matter. So godly grief produces a change in the way in which people think about themselves, a change in their attitude to God, and here also, of course, a change in their attitude to the person who has rebuked them, and that is Paul.

Of course, if godly grief is part of your life, you'll be so pleased when people tell you what's wrong with you, won't you? You'll say, thank you so much for pointing out my sin.

That's very kind of you, very generous of you, very thoughtful of you, for now I can experience godly grief that produces repentance, that leads to salvation, that brings no regret.

[7 : 49] In fact, it would be tremendous for this church if over coffee this morning we all told each other what was wrong with each other. We could have a splendid morning, wouldn't we? Well, what's wrong with you is, and then you can tell them.

It's good, it's great. If you're married, you can head off into a corner and have a really splendid time. And then we'll have lots of, I hope, godly grief and not worldly grief. I'm sorry, I made a mistake.

That is godly grief. Saying to God, I'm sorry, I made a mistake, I did something which was wrong, I didn't do what I should have done. That is godly grief. For godly grief says, I'm sorry God that I've hurt you.

Whereas worldly grief, which is really just remorse, says, I'm sorry for myself. Godly grief says, I made a mistake.

Worldly grief is always blaming other people for my mistakes. Godly grief says, I've done wrong and I'm going to change. Worldly grief says, I feel so sorry for myself, I can't change anything.

[9 : 02] Godly grief is healthy for us. Whereas worldly grief, remorse, is self-destructive. You see, worldly grief is saying, I've made a mistake, I feel sorry for myself, poor me.

Worldly grief is saying, I'm the one to be pitied, not, I'm the one to change. Have you ever raised children and know how alarming it is if you see them engaging in sulking, worldly grief?

Where they're sorry for themselves, not, sorry they've done something wrong. I will remember when I was about nine, I think it was, the boy next door had a new tricycle.

And I decided, just by way of pure scientific experiment, to see what would happen if I pushed him off his tricycle. So he was riding his tricycle happily along the road. I went up to him and I pushed him off, just like that.

There was no malice in it at all. It was a scientific experiment. To find out what would happen if you pushed a little boy off his tricycle. I pushed him off his tricycle, he gashed his leg, and I was in my room for the afternoon.

[10 : 18] Was I sorry? Not for a moment. I'd made an important scientific discovery. What happens if you push little boys off tricycles? No grief at all, no repentance, no desire to change.

Indeed, there was almost a decision for a settled pattern of a lifetime of pushing little boys off tricycles. I've only just grown out of it as a matter of fact. See, godly grief means I've done wrong, I'm going to change the way I live.

Worldly grief says, well, I'm just the way I am and I feel sorry for myself. I'm humiliated, but I won't change. Worldly grief is self-pitying, bitter, full of despair and anger and self-justification.

Worldly grief is self-centered. And as somebody has said, some tears are lethal because worldly grief, feeling sorry for ourselves, produces death.

Godly grief says, I have sinned against God and against you. Worldly grief says, I am hurting. Godly grief says, I must change.

[11 : 28] Worldly grief says, I cannot change. Godly grief says, please forgive me. Worldly grief says, people should pity me.

Godly grief is great grief. It is good grief because there is joy in heaven, Jesus tells us, over one sinner who repents.

Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings what? No regret. But worldly grief produces death.

If you want to think about the difference between godly grief and worldly grief, you can go to the Old Testament. We can think of David, King David and King Saul.

King David is a great example of godly grief. Does King David make mistakes? Yes, he does. Commits adultery with Bathsheba and has Uriah the Hittite her husband killed in the front line of battle.

[12 : 41] Those are two dreadful things that the King David has done. Adultery and murder. When David is rebuked, what does he do? Does he say, oh, poor me?

No, when David is rebuked, he says, I have sinned. Have mercy on me, oh God, after your great goodness. When David is rebuked, when his sin is pointed out, he has the honesty to say, I have sinned.

What wonderful words. Words of truth. Words which will lead to forgiveness. Words which God loves to hear. I have sinned. But if you contrast David with King Saul, you'll find the biggest contrast between godly grief and Saul's worldly grief.

Again and again, when Saul does something wrong, God sends someone to rebuke him. But does Saul change the way he lives? Not for a moment. He's full of tears of sorrow, self-pity, but no real repentance towards God.

No wonder that God discards Saul and gives David an everlasting kingdom. David is a good example of godly grief, of someone who says, I have sinned, please forgive me.

[13 : 59] Whereas Saul only feels sorry for himself. Or think in the New Testament of, say, Peter and Judas. Peter's a great example of godly grief and Judas a frightening example of worldly grief.

Does Peter make mistakes? Yes, as a matter of fact, Peter seems to make as many mistakes as anybody could possibly make. But does that leave Peter to feel sorry for himself and go away from God?

Not at all. When Jesus invites him, Peter returns to him. That is, godly grief marks Peter. What does Judas do?

Judas who betrayed Jesus. Why? As we know from 2 Corinthians chapter 7, worldly grief produces death. So when Judas has failed and betrayed his Lord, there is no attempt at repentance, no returning to Jesus to ask for forgiveness.

There is death. You know, all these athletes busy taking drugs, I don't know how they get time to train, as a matter of fact.

[15 : 11] They seem to be all the time ingesting themselves with all sorts of things. I just wish one of them would say, I've done wrong. Wouldn't that be extraordinary? If someone got up and said, yes, I did take drugs, it was a wrong thing to do, and I apologise to everybody, I'm very sorry about it.

I did the wrong thing. I'm thinking of asking a question at our diocese in Synod in a few weeks' time. We're allowed to ask questions of the Archbishop at the beginning of Synod, and I thought I might ask the Archbishop, are there any cases of Archdeacons taking equine growth hormones in the Diocese of Melbourne, and if so, what has been the result?

I suspect the answer will be very long toenails. But it's all very well me wanting athletes to say, I've done wrong. Of course, at present, what the world wants of the Church is for Church leaders to say, we have done wrong.

You see, the best thing a Church leader can do if a minister has done something wrong is to engage in godly grief, produces repentance, that leads to salvation, brings no regret.

But the Church leadership is often marked by worldly grief when they say, well isn't this dreadful, don't you feel sorry for us, what a great pity this is. That's worldly grief that produces death. You know, we Christians ought to be able to model good, healthy repentance because we know we're sinners.

[16 : 41] We ought to be the first to say, we have done wrong instead of being the last to say, we've made a mistake.

One of the Christian organisations I'm associated with, please don't ask me which one it is, after the service, recently made a mistake. You know, the remarkable thing was, three months after making the mistake, they said, we made a mistake, we're sorry.

I was so pleased, so proud of them because it's so hard for Christians to say, we made a mistake, we're sorry, but they did.

And we Greek Christians, we believers in Jesus Christ, we who know that Jesus died for our sins, we who know that God loves sinners, we ought to be the first to say, we have sinned, we have made a mistake, we repent, please forgive us.

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. I like paintings that are simple and plain.

[18 : 05] I don't like these modern ones where you have to wonder what the artist is worrying about or what they had for breakfast. I like, you know, a picture of a pig and underneath it says pig and you think, yeah, that's a pig. Reminds me of my first books when I was a child or a picture which has a dog in it and underneath it says this is a dog.

And I think, yeah, that's exactly right, that is a dog. Well done artist. Well, I particularly like the paintings of an English artist called Hogarth and in one of them he does a series of paintings, pictures of, as he calls it, marriage a la mode.

And if you've seen the pictures you'll know that it's the story of an impoverished young nobleman and in the first, I think it's something like this, that goes something like this, a marriage is being arranged between this young man and a wealthy young girl and you can see the lawyers in the background enjoying arranging this marriage.

A little later you see the next one where the husband and the wife are sitting together looking absolutely bored with each other. Then you see the young man in a brothel getting some dreadful disease. Then you see him in the next one playing cards losing all his money while he's being robbed and the last one he's in prison, I think, and then dies and then you see his poor wife left behind.

Very plain story and what it is is a picture of worldly grief. At no time does the young man say, I've done the wrong thing. At no time does he say, does he turn to God and say, please forgive me.

[19 : 37] No, no. It's worldly grief which produces death. Well, I've been talking about one verse in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 and I've been talking about individuals, you and me, engaging in godly grief that produces repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret and I've been warning you as I've actually been warning myself against refusing to repent, against that self-centered remorse, that worldly grief that produces death.

But as a matter of fact, the situation in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 is not about individuals and godly or worldly grief, it's about a church marked by either godly or worldly grief.

You might remember the church has been refusing to exercise some discipline in its life together. One of its members has been committing a grave sin and the church has refused to act and so Paul has written to them a severe letter and sent Titus to follow it up.

And what Paul is looking for is not just for individuals in the church to say, we've done something which is wrong, please forgive us. What Paul is looking for is for the whole church to say together, we have sinned, please forgive us.

And the miracle is, it actually happened. Isn't that extraordinary? A whole church has said, we've made a mistake, please forgive us. A church which exercises no self-discipline, no discipline of its members, is a church which is engaging in worldly grief, not godly grief.

[21 : 26] If your church leaders discovered that one of your home group leaders was engaging in abusive behaviour of members of the home group or Bible study, would they stop that person leading a Bible study?

Home group? I hope so. What about if the church treasurer was discovered nuking the church funds? Would the church wardens sack the treasurer?

terror? I hope so. What about if you had somebody who was gossiping in the congregation, spreading slander around?

Would the church leaders say, stop it or leave? I hope so. And I hope you, the members of the church, would support the leaders.

that would be a godly repentance, a godly grief, rather than a worldly grief. But what about when a whole church has to repent?

[22 : 29] I had the impertinence to ask you earlier on in this sermon if you had sinned recently, which is a very rude question, which polite people don't ask, but oh, what the heck, it's worth it.

Here's another question for you. Has this church sinned? Has Hultrinity Doncaster sinned? Ever?

In 150 years? What are the options? You could say, no, never? Well, hardly ever. We've never sinned.

Or you could say, well, yes, I think our church has sinned. If you said, oh, yes, our church has sinned, then of course I'll ask you if that sin was followed by godly grief or worldly grief.

Godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. sinned.

[23 : 35] What are the kinds of sins of which a church should repent? Well, when I was at St. Jude's in Carlton, and I was vicar there, the thing which worried me was that St.

Jude's might stop being a church of Jesus Christ and just become a club for friendly people. people. It's actually quite easy for a church to degenerate from being a church of Jesus Christ based on Christ as their sole foundation, for a good church, a big church, just to become a club of like-minded people where people like meeting on a Sunday morning.

It's a pretty harmless thing to do, not very dangerous to go to church. You meet people you know, you get a nice cup of coffee afterwards, if you're lucky, a couple of biscuits, a free mug, and you're home again. Well, not a free mug in your case, but I've got a free mug anyway.

See, that's what churches can do. They can stop being churches and just become a club for people, for nice people. And if a church did that, there's plenty of room for repentance, isn't it?

Plenty of room for the whole church to say, God, we have disgraced you. God, we have not honoured your name. God, we have not been the people you want us to be.

[24 : 49] God, we have not known you through Jesus Christ and loved you. God, we have not served you in every part of our life. Or imagine if a church spent its money solely on itself.

If I, as an individual, spend all the money I earn on myself, that's selfishness. But that's true of a church as well. A church which is raising money for its own needs is a selfish church.

There's nothing godly about selfishness. It's a sin and the church should repent. Or imagine a church which keeps the great treasure of the gospel to itself.

Every Sunday it thinks we're so glad God has been merciful to us and never thinks about God's desire to be merciful to people outside. A church which is doing no evangelism is a self-centered, selfish church.

And that church should repent. Yes, friends, godly grief should mark the lives of individual believers.

[25 : 58] That godly grief that produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret. And godly grief should mark the life of a church as well.

for where the people of Jesus Christ, saved by his blood, and there is joy in heaven over a church which repents, as well as an individual who repents.

And where there is true repentance, not remorse, where there's a true turning to God, not self-pity, where there is a true desire to change, not self-justification, there is the joy of repentance.

Paul describes that joy in the last few verses of chapter 7. In addition to our own consolation, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his mind has been set at rest by all of you.

verse 15, his heart goes out all the more to you as he remembers the obedience of you all, and how you welcomed him with fear and trembling. I rejoice because I now have complete confidence in you.

[27 : 20] When there is true repentance, godly grief, a true turning to God, then there is joy in the heart of God, and joy among the people of God.

I have sinned, difficult words to say, great words to say. We have sinned, difficult words to say, great words to say.

Good grief is godly grief. Godly grief is good grief.

Godly grief produces repentance. It leads to salvation and brings with it no regrets. But worldly grief produces death.

Let's pray. Our gracious God, our heavenly Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we bring our lives before you, we know that individually we make mistakes.

[28 : 40] Sometimes we choose to do the wrong thing. Sometimes we fail to do what is right. God, when we fail, please give us your gracious gift of repentance of godly grief, so that we turn quickly to you and ask your forgiveness, and we turn quickly to those whom we've hurt and ask their forgiveness.

Please save us from debilitating and weakening and weakening worldly grief, which is self-centered and self-pitying. And Father, when our churches make mistakes, when our church leaders make mistakes, when we make a mistake as a church, then please bring us quickly to godly grief, so that we repent and turn to you for forgiveness and change the way we live and rid our lives of worldly grief, which is self-pitying and weakening.

So grant us true repentance, we pray, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Amen.