

Repent!

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[0 : 00] Okay, we're just starting a two-week series just in the build-up to Easter.! And next week John will be speaking on Anticipate.

! And this week we have the slides up please. We're going to talk about repent. So there's nice. Thirty and more years ago I worked while I was qualifying, I worked in a children's home and I had to walk past an old chapel on the way to the home from the train station.

I walked past it quite regularly because I worked there. And they had a wayside pulpit, a notice board, whatever you want to call it outside, and they had this notice on it.

Beware your sins will find you out. Repent! It's true. There's no arguing with the truth that your sins will find you out.

And there's no arguing with the wisdom of a call to repent. But I did think, I could think of other verses that I'd stick upon a wayside pulpit on a notice board outside a chapel rather than that one.

[1 : 20] And the problem is that when we talk about repentance, it feels like I need to put my frock coat on and grow a beard and look a bit more severe.

But whatever we think about the word, whatever it conjures up in us, is an important part of our faith and an important part of our walk with Jesus.

And as we come up to the celebration of Easter, it's appropriate that we pause and think about repentance. And think about, what does that mean?

And how do I do it? The Association of Christian Preachers once wrote, or an article in the journal once said, if you have no hope to preach, don't preach.

So I thought that to start with, I'd give us some hope as we think about repentance. Next slide, please. Some words that are very, very familiar to many of us.

[2 : 25] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just.

God is faithful and just. And He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So hold that in your heart and in your head as we go through the next couple of hours as I preach.

That bit wasn't a joke. Some words from Ezekiel. They're a little bit small, but I'll read them for you. But if the wicked turn away from all their sins they have committed and keep all my statutes and do what is lawful and right, they shall surely live.

They shall not die. None of the transgressions they have committed shall be remembered against them. For the righteousness that they have done, they shall live.

Have I any pleasure in death of the wicked, says the Lord God, and not rather they should turn away from their sins and live? Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life because they considered and turned away from all their transgressions they had committed.

[4 : 02] They shall surely live. They shall not die. Therefore, I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord your God.

Repent and turn away from your transgressions. Me, me, oh, I beg your pardon, there's a typo there. You have committed against me, I beg your pardon, and the iniquity will be your ruin.

I'm sorry, there's a typo there. Let's go to the bold bit. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.

I love that bit at the end. Get rid of these sins and get yourself a new heart and a new spirit. It's apologies for the typo there.

I spotted it and I didn't change it. Next slide, please. Billy Graham says this, the wonderful news is that the Lord our God, sorry, our Lord is a God of mercy and he responds to repentance.

[5 : 15] And what that does, what I've tried to do here is place ourselves in the hope of repentance. Repentance is part of what we need to do.

But there is a purpose to it, there's a value to it, but there's also a hope in it. And as we repent, God responds. As we repent, God responds.

And he's a Lord of mercy. So, it isn't a dismal topic. It's a good topic. It's an exciting topic.

And as I've been considering repentance this weekend for a little bit longer, I've got quite excited.

Quite excited. Not about maybe the, the, the repentance bit.

It's, that, that's an indication of my sin. But the fruit, the fruit and the value of repentance. Okay. So, next slide, please.

[6 : 16] What is repentance? There's, there's two words that we need to be aware of. Shuv, which is a nice word, isn't it? The Hebrew word, turn back or return from wandering.

Turn back or return from wandering. So, there's, there's something there about, as we repent, there's a physical or emotional or a spiritual turning.

We've wandered off, we've drifted off in our own behaviors, our own attitudes, our own language, our own thinking from the way that God wants to.

And because of that, we have to do something about it and we have to turn back to God. Metanoia, the Greek, inward change of mind, thought, and perspective.

Inward change of mind, thought, and perspective. So, there's something about repentance which is about the things we have done, turning away from them, saying, I will no longer behave like that, speak like that, act like that, or participate in that.

[7 : 48] But there's also something about our thinking, our thought life, and the way that our thought life can be so really quite damaging and difficult in our relationship with God.

Because thoughts go everywhere, don't they? If you sit and be quiet, I mean, maybe you don't, maybe it's unique to me, if it is, you can have an insight into my brain for a few minutes.

But I think, oh, I'll just sit and look at the beauty of God's creation. And sometimes I can sit and look at the beauty, I can sit on Westcliffe and look out to sea, I love seeing big boats, the traffic jam of big boats sometimes on the shipping lane on the horizon, it's great, I love it.

And I can sit there and enjoy God. And sometimes I can sit there and within a millisecond of starting to pray, I'm thinking about what I might get from Sainsbury's later.

or something that happened at work or the fact that I'm crossed with something or somebody or the world situation. All sorts of things go through my brain.

[9 : 03] And as that happens, my mind, my thought and my perspective drift away from a focus on Almighty God.

And sometimes it's harder to recognise that and do something about it than the behaviour. Poor behaviour is pretty obvious.

I know what poor behaviour looks like and I know that I need to repent of that. But it's our thinking, our attitudes, which we need to think about too and we need to change.

So it's a physical or mental turning away from sin. It's a change of direction back to God in thought and word and deed.

Next slide, please. Repentance is biblical. That's called a statement of the obvious. It's important to say it. It's a core theme throughout the Bible.

[10 : 20] And so we have all sorts of prophets wandering around the place saying, repent. And they often were wearing sackclothed ashes and were tearing their clothes and shouting in the streets.

Repent. So Jonah in chapter 3. Repent to the people of Nineveh. Wandering around the streets of Nineveh covered in ashes saying, you've got this wrong and God's going to come and judge you.

Repent. And of course the people of Nineveh did and God forgave them and then Jonah got into a bit of a grump.

But the Old Testament is full of the call to repentance. The call to whole towns, whole cities, whole areas, whole peoples to repentance.

And then in the New Testament Jesus and his apostles routinely emphasised repentance. Luke chapter 5. I've come to call not the righteous but the sinners to repentance says Jesus.

[11 : 37] Acts chapter 3. Repent therefore and turn to God so your sins might be wiped out so that times of refreshing might come. Isn't that a lovely lovely verse that Acts 3.19?

Repent therefore and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out. I think we know that bit. I think we get that bit. but the bonus there, the bonus in that verse at the second part of verse 19 of Acts chapter 3 so that times of refreshing might come.

Does anybody here today could really do with a bit of refreshing? Yeah? A bit of refreshing.

Whatever that refreshing might be it might be a physical refreshing, a healing.

It might just be an emotional, a psychological, a thought life refreshing. Or it just might be oh, it's just hard at the moment.

Repent and turn to God so your sins might be wiped out so that times of refreshing might come.

Incidentally, just for clarity and it's important clarity, if you're having a tough time it might not be because you need to repent although we all need to repent, don't we?

[13:05] It might not be because you've done something wrong, it might be that life is hard. So please don't get condemned by that. But be encouraged, be encouraged by the fruit and the benefit of repentance.

Through that comes refreshing. Next slide, please. This is Charles Spurgeon. I chose this picture because he looked like a disappointed shopkeeper.

There are lots of other better ones but it just made me chortle when I saw it. Repentance grows as faith grows. Do not make any mistake about it. Repentance is not a thing of days and weeks, a temporary penance to get over as fast as possible.

No, it's the grace of a lifetime like faith itself. God's little children repent and so do young men and the fathers. Repentance is the inseparable companion of faith.

Spurgeon saying in his own inimitable way, you've got to do it all the time. And the idea that we, let's get a bit of repentance in and move on.

[14:21] A bit like going to the dentist, you know you've got to do it, but it's best got out of the way quickly. We've got to be people of repentance, a repentant people.

And that's not a call that you hear very often, we need to be a joyful people or a forgiven people or a whatever people, we need to be a repentant people. And we need to be people who take this really seriously.

Why should we repent? Next slide. Well, we all sin and we all fall short of the glory of God.

Okay? So we know that and we know that as we sin we separate ourselves from God. So as I've already said, our sin might be thought or word or deed, might be the things that we have done or the things that we have not done.

Just a nod to my Anglicanism there. But we all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. So we need to repent because it is part of the normal human condition to get it wrong.

[15:42] We try really hard not to sin. And some sins are really very much easier, not really very easy, much easier to avoid than others.

But whenever if you read particularly Paul's letters, he has lists of sins. He starts off with murder and witchcraft and ends up with jealousy and pride.

Alright? The point making being made there is it's all sin. It's all sin. So let's not, first of all, let's not get into a place where actually we're absolutely fine.

We don't find a need to repent because we're not sinful. Or if the sins I commit, well, they're just sort of little ones. And they don't really matter, not like the big ones.

And sin separates us from God. And yet repentance and the receipt through repentance of forgiveness means that we can be reconciled to God.

[16:55] And that's just a wonderful thing. We're separated from God, we're reconciled to God. Almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth, who loves you, who wants the best for you.

What we will celebrate in two weeks' time, on Easter Sunday morning, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the victory over death, the victory over sin, the availability of forgiveness for each of us. repentance. That's why repentance is so wonderful. Because it brings us back to God. And we do that by confession.

And we do that by repentance. Confession, accepting that we've fallen short of God's best.

Repentance, the turning away from our sin, the shove and the metanoia.

Okay. So, how do I repent? How do I repent? Mostly, in private.

[18:18] Mostly, it's one of those times where we go to our chamber, whatever our chamber is, we go to our quiet, private place, and we confess and repent.

Sometimes, though, it's appropriate and important to do that with a trusted other. Sometimes, an act of confession can be very helpful.

And we need to be mindful that it might be that sometimes, actually, to get this out of my system. I need to tell somebody else, so that they can help me as I walk the road back to God.

So, never ever reject the idea of confession. But often, it's on our own. And I'll tell you, I put kneeling can be helpful because I find it helpful.

And I'm, you know, many people won't find it helpful. If you've got bad knees, it's quite hard. But if you're kneeling in confession, when you're finished, work out what else you can do while you're down there.

[19 : 31] Maybe do a bit of light dusting or something like that. But you don't have to kneel. You don't have to kneel. Why do I kneel? Well, frankly, because I find it helpful body posture to say, you are God and I'm me.

Okay? But you can do, you don't have to. But I'll just put that there because it is, for me, helpful.

Adopt an attitude of repentance, a physical shape of repentance.

Now, this next point is very, very important. I really wanted to emphasize this. Repentance is not an act of self-flagellation and debasement, self-flagellation, beating yourself.

self-flagellation. This is not about making you feel horrid or getting into self-hatred. It's about humbling ourselves before God and allowing God to reconcile us back to Him.

But the problem is that when we have sinned, the evil one, the accuser, will come in and tell us two things.

[20 : 48] First of all, that's completely unforgivable. And secondly, you're a horrible, horrible person.

None of that is true. None of that is true. What we're doing in repentance is going as a child, a humble child, back to Almighty God, who envelops us in his arms, holds us close, and whispers words of love in our ear.

We had healing streams yesterday, and John spent some time in the morning talking about the Aaronic blessing, the Lord bless you and keep you. love in the Lord.

And there's a lovely phrase in there, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you. And I spent some of the time in the afternoon allowing that phrase to go around my head.

And it was one of those times where my head remained mostly unrebelling, and I kept with that concept. Let me tell you where I got to, because it was very moving.

[22 : 04] It got me to an old black and white film, not a real film, but playing in my head, of father being in his study.

And you need to go back to something like Mary Poppins, or that sort of idea of father in an old house, and father had a study, and father went to the study to smoke his pipe and do his work. Okay? And so father was in his study in a chair that went round, and child knocked on the door, and pushed the door open tentatively, and father turned from his work, and looked, and the beautiful, gentle smile of love, welcome, and acceptance, and child ran in, and sat on father's knee, and they talked.

the Lord lift up his countenance upon you. That's what's happening. We go to the, I don't think God's got an office, by the way, but we go and he lifts his countenance and he smiles, a smile of love, of welcome, of acceptance.

repentance. He sits you on his knee and you talk to him about the things that we've goofed up, that I've goofed up, and he forgives me, and he loves me, and he whispers words of love in my ear.

[23 : 47] That's what repentance is. And if as you repent, or as you know that you need to repent, you get into feelings of self-hatred, reject them in the name of Jesus.

That is not the currency that God deals with. Be honest, forthright, and complete in your repentance.

It's absolutely fine in some respects to say, God, I'm sorry for the things I've done, Amen. But that's just hiding the truth from God who knows all truth.

That's hiding the facts from God who knows everything. So tell him. Tell him what's happened. Tell him what went wrong. Tell him what you've done, thought, and felt.

Allow that to come out of your heart, either verbally, either out loud, or in your head. Sometimes a little bit like kneeling, it's sometimes useful to say the words out loud.

[24 : 58] But sometimes it's quite hard to do that. That's okay. But be honest. There's no point in hiding stuff from God because you can't.

God knows. Secret you think you're being, God knows. We need to recognize our sin. We need to feel genuine sorrow for our sin. We need to confess our sin. And we need to strive to change. It's not just words.

It will require action as well. and it will require a heart willing to follow God's will. Next slide please. Corrie Ten Boom, four marks of true repentance, our acknowledgement of wrong, willingness to confess it, willingness to abandon it, willingness to make restitution.

[26 : 04] Helpful little ideas there from Corrie Ten Boom. Now the next slide please. Let me read you some verses from Exodus 32.

And the context of this is that Moses had gone up the mountain and the Israelites got a bit bored waiting for him to come back down again. And so they told Aaron that probably Moses had died or gone off and done something else.

And they said let's make a golden calf. Well Aaron said let's make a golden calf. They made a golden calf and started prancing around it and doing all sorts of daft things. When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

He took the calf the people had made, the golden calf, and burned it in the fire. Then he ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

He didn't just chuck it in the bin or put it on a shelf. He took it and he ground it, no he burnt it rather, and then he ground it, and then he put it in water and then made the Israelites drink it.

[27 : 23] I googled yesterday what happens if you drink gold flecks of gold, which if I'm ever arrested for some sort of bank heist, might be an interesting part of my internet history, but there we are, I live with that risk.

I trust that I won't be arrested for a bank heist, but if I did, this is why, this is evidence, this is why I googled it. What happens if you swallow gold is it just passes through the system, it cannot be ingested.

What Moses was doing here is saying, I am going to utterly, utterly destroy and dispose of this thing which has caused you to sin.

Okay? And that's a good model. Now, some caution here, please. Some caution here, please. I'm not asking you to go and smash up half your household goods and then drink it.

Please don't. Please don't. But what if you've got a book on your shelf? And you know it's a book that's just not helpful to have.

[28 : 37] And you put it up high and you never get it down but it's still there. Shred it. Get rid. Don't put it in a charity shop because somebody else will get it. Just get a shot of it.

Just throw it away. What if you have a DVD at home? I was going to say a video but you know. Pretty modern DVDs. Or something downloaded.

And no you shouldn't have it. Get rid. Cut the DVD up. Delete the download. And delete the delete. And do whatever you do with downloads. Get rid of it. Okay. If you've got something in your life that you know is not helping you get rid of it.

And get rid of it in the name of Jesus. And if you need help with that talk to somebody who's trusted and ask them to help you get rid of it.

[29 : 39] We just need to get good at ridding ourselves of stuff which is just not helpful and just not okay. Get rid.

All right. It was rather nice wasn't it? I was quite enjoying it. Get rid of what makes you sin.

Okay. The serious point there is sometimes we know we're holding on to things that we didn't ought to be holding on to. Please don't.

Even if you've never looked at it for a year, two years, twenty years, put it in the bin, shred it, cut it up, delete it, and ask God to help you not go back to that.

Because he will. And if it's something that you think is appropriate and helpful, talk to somebody else about it. Talk to a trusted other. Next slide, please.

[30 : 52] When do I repent when I've sinned? There you are. I thought of that one myself.

Complicated, but I got there. Repentance is not a one-off.

It's a daily requirement. It's what Spurgeon was saying. It's not a one-off. Or we don't do it on Easter Saturday ready for Easter Sunday.

Or we don't do it on Saturday night or Sunday morning ready for Sunday service. Or just before communion. We need to get into a habit of repentance. It needs to be part of our lifestyle and our life with Jesus.

It needs to be part of our conversation. Remembering at all times, this is not about self abasement. This is not about telling yourself you're useless.

It's remembering that you are human. Remembering that we all sin and we all can be forgiven. Repentance is an ongoing journey of growth, humility, prosperity and renewal in faith.

[32 : 02] That idea of renewal. He makes us new. Behold, I make all things new, including your behavior. Isn't that just wonderful?

Next slide, please. So the benefits of repentance. I think I've covered much of this, but I wanted just to have to list them.

God wants us to repent. It's part of what he wants us to do. That's good enough. That's a good enough benefit. But the benefit is we're reconciled to God.

We're reconciled to God. God, if you take my image of the father and the child in the study, you're on his knee. He's holding you, enveloping you in arms of love and whispering words of love in your ear.

We're reconciled to God. We're cleansed from all unrighteousness. Isn't that good? Cleansed from all unrighteousness. This might not work, but go with me.

[33 : 13] You know when you've changed the bed and you've got really nice clean sheets on the bone on the line so they smell nice, unless you live next to the M62, and you get into bed and it feels like, oh, this is great.

It doesn't last long, but isn't it good? Cleansed from all unrighteousness. It works for me. If it doesn't work for you looking like, what are you talking about? Get your own idea.

But being cleansed from all unrighteousness. It's good for our physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Feeling guilty, feeling bad, feeling miserable, that stuff, is not good for us.

Many, many, many research projects, many sociologists and psychologists and lots of otherologists have researched this, and they've discovered that feeling bad about yourself or feeling guilty about something does you no good.

Is that right? That was worth a hundred thousand pound research grant, wasn't it? It's been said for years in the Bible. Being forgiven, repenting and being forgiven is good for you.

[34 : 31] it makes you feel good. Great joy comes from forgiveness. Great joy from heaven comes from forgiveness.

Comes as we repent. We can have great joy. And joy is a wonderful thing. God And then, to go back to Ezekiel, you get a heart of flesh to replace your heart of stone.

Not literally, because you haven't got a heart of stone. But when we are in places apart from where we should be with God, our heart, our feelings, our behaviors, our sense, just gets a bit harder.

And gets a bit harder. And gets a bit harder. And then we don't like people. And we don't like stuff. And we speak immoderately.

And we speak unkindly. And we act immoderately. And we act unkindly. And then we have that heart of stone taken out. And we get a fleshy, loving, kind, generous, interested, welcoming, inclusive heart.

[35 : 47] That's the benefit. That's the benefit of repentance and receiving forgiveness. And so, last slide please.

Let's make repentance a daily part of your walk with Christ. If it isn't, make it. If it is, carry on. Delight in the joy of forgiveness. And go on knowing that you're dearly loved and forgiven child of the living God.

Amen.