

Repentance, and its Fruit
Jeremiah 7:1-11, Trinity Sunday X
July 27, 2008

Beloved of the Lord..... Over and over again in the Bible, we see the great necessity of repentance. Without a doubt, the Bible teaches all men everywhere should repent of their sins, lest they perish eternally for their sins. In Matthew 3:21 John the Baptist preached, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In Matthew 4:17 Jesus preached, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In Mark 1:15 Jesus preached, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

The Bible speaks of repentance in two ways, a narrow way and a broad way. First, the narrow: Jesus once spoke of eighteen people who were killed when a tower collapsed upon them (Luke 13). To His audience Jesus said: do you think they were sinners greater than you? "I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." To repent here means we ought to be sorry for our sins and afraid of God's wrath and punishment. What He has done to others, He can also do to you. Similarly in Mark 1:15 Jesus preached, "repent ye, and believe the gospel", that is to say, "Repent of your sins which bring death and believe only in Me, for I have come to give you life!" Jesus desires we believe the Gospel, which is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Repentance then in the wide sense of the term includes faith in Jesus for forgiveness. Such repentance is conversion. This is the repentance that all men need, for all men need faith in Christ if they are to be saved. The Lutheran church has always confessed this Bible teaching. "Repentance consists properly of these two parts: One is contrition, that is, terrors smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin; the other is faith, which is born of the Gospel, or of absolution, and believe that, for Christ's sake, sins are forgiven, comforts the conscience and delivers from its terrors (Augs. Conf. XII)." Therefore when we speak of repentance in the broad sense, we include faith in Christ, and Christ brings comfort. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." When the heart clings to Christ by faith, there is always the desire to stop sinning, and amend our sinful ways. That is the focus of our sermon today.

I. Repentance in general. We see in the preaching of Jeremiah, that God desires the repentance of all men, and He also loathes and hates hypocrisy. Jeremiah was to "Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord." He was essentially to stand at the door to the church and tell all men they must repent of their sins, and amend their evil ways, so that God will dwell with them forever.

"Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The

temple of the Lord, are these." The problem with the people of Judah, was they had listened too long to the false prophets who preached in a way that led to self-righteousness. Instead of repenting of their sins which would not profit them, their religion was nothing more than going through the motions. They gave God lip service, rather than true and sincere repentance of heart. They gave no thought to the gravity of their sin, or how offensive their day to day life was against God. Though they regularly went to the Temple every Sabbath, though they fasted and gave tithes to the Temple, they cared little if they sinned the other six days of the week. Like many in our world today, they assumed God would forgive their evil, by doing a little good now and then. When Jeremiah preached that they ought to amend their sinful ways, it was to awaken the knowledge of sin in their heart. "By the law is the knowledge of sin", the Bible says.

What was their sin? Evidently they were not exercising a true and right judgment of their neighbor. The judges and officials of the people would accept bribes, which would pervert justice. They would show favor to one person or another, because of their wealth or position, but if their neighbor was poor they would just take advantage of them. If you were an orphan they would say "Tough luck, that's not my problem." Like Cain they would say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" They were also selfish and greedy. They treated their money as if since they earned it, they could do whatever they wanted with it. They forgot that all they had was a gift from God, "a trust O Lord from thee." They were like children who would not share their toys, their blessings, but only fight tooth and nail for every last cent. They even showed little love or care for the widows. Their priests and ministers were guilty of great sins too. They grew fat off the church like many do today. They didn't care for the souls of the people, but only themselves. Even worse, if God sent a true prophet to the people, and the prophet dared to preach against the common sins of the day, they would just murder that prophet and shed his innocent blood, rather than repent. God therefore through Jeremiah told them He would not forgive them of any of their sins, if they continued doing these evil things. God was saying, "Unless you repent, I will punish and destroy you and you will not be allowed to worship in my Temple any more."

"Behold ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; and come and stand before me in this house? which is called by my name and say: We are delivered to do all these abominations?" In short, God is rebuking their hypocrisy. He is saying, "Is it right to hate your brother, to lust after his sister, to toss about my holy name in vain as if it is not sacred? Is it right to put anything first in your life before Me.....and then walk into my Temple, my house, and say 'Lord I love you with all my heart and mind and soul!' Is that right? Is it right for you to call yourselves the children of God, when you for six days each week walk as children of the world.....Is that right?"

Of course, we are no better than the people of Judah. We've committed all the same sins, and we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. Likewise we should not be as the Judeans, who thought they could be religious one day of the week, and sinful all other days. Where there is faith in Christ, our outward life will reflect it. We will amend our evil ways. We cannot go to church on Sunday and be a Christian for a day, and the other six days of the week happily blend in with the world and hide our faith. Repentance should be a daily part of the Christian life. When Jesus says, "Repent ye and believe the Gospel" we by faith remember that we are in daily need of repentance, and we daily need His grace. It is our own sins that ruin and destroy many aspects of our life - but in Jesus there is perfect help and perfect healing.

II. In God's House, where God's grace is freely given, there is life everlasting. That is really why we go to church, God's house, God's Temple. Though it is not the house or building that is important, we gather or assemble together around His Word, for His Word brings us His grace. We who are sinners, daily need this Word, for we daily need to hear Jesus say to us "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Don't we all desire such healing for our sins? Well in Christ Jesus let me assure you, there is perfect healing for all the wrongs you have done in life. Jesus grants that balm of healing. Your sins of murder, Christ made His own. Your sins of adultery, Christ made His own. Your sins of greed, selfishness, pride, and deceit, Christ made His own. Before you were even born, your Savior willingly took all these sins upon Himself, nailing them to His own cross. In this way His blood cleanses us from all in. All therefore that God desires of you, is your faith, faith in God's only-begotten Son who came to save you. This is why God in Isaiah says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." He wants only for you to come to Him in faith. "Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wise cast out."

In the Christian life, repentance is a turning, and continual returning, unto the Lord by faith. Though daily our flesh causes us out of weakness to turn away from Christ (the good that I would I do not....), it is faith in Christ which continually turns and returns us back to Christ. Being sorry for our sins is a part of this, but faith in Christ is by far the better half of repentance. Often we feel quite powerless when it comes to our battle against the sins of our flesh. Perhaps we struggle with pride or a lack of patience, or any number of other sins, nevertheless the grace of God is constantly upon us through Christ. By His power we fight the good fight of faith. What is important to remember however, is that when we see the sin we have done, and we are truly sorry in our heart, let us remember the precious words of Christ, "Thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace." Repentance then is a turning, a continual turning and returning, to Christ our Savior who loved us and gave His life for us. Though our sins and our heart condemn us, "God is greater than our heart and knoweth all things." He

knows your sorrow over sin. But He would have you know His love for you is stronger than your sin.

Knowing this blessed truth, we bring forth the fruits of repentance. If we have stolen from our neighbor, we will return it and pay what we owe. If we are at odds with our brother, we will be reconciled and make peace. "As much as lieth with you, live peaceably with all men". We will also forgive our brother from the heart, as God from His heart has forgiven us. We will do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of faith. We will confess our sins, and not hide them. We will prioritize our life, and put God and His kingdom first, and all else second. We will align, or work to align our whole life in a way that is pleasing, acceptable to God - for we live by His grace. Even our inward thoughts we will seek to amend. Paul writes, "Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things....and the God of peace shall be with you."

Beloved of the Lord, God does not want us to be weary in our battle against sin. We are strengthened daily by His grace. Let us also not be deceived into thinking that the Christian so repents and amends their life, that they just stop sinning entirely. "We daily sin much." Nevertheless through Christ we amend, and continually desire to amend our evil ways. But this battle takes place by faith. Let us therefore give all praise to God who not only worked sorrow into our heart for our sin, but that He did it only so we would receive Christ by faith. Through Christ God's blessing is continually upon us. He will therefore with tender love help and support you in your battles against sin. Look to Christ by faith, and there you will find the strength and power to amend. Amen.

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