

Lenten Midweek 2 – 2024

Repent and Believe the Good News – 2024 Theme

Repentance and Faith

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 Peter 1:3-12

How many of y'all fantasize about going back to 1980 and investing in Apple stock? Forest Gump said that Lieutenant Dan took care of his Bubba Gump shrimping money and that Lieutenant Dan had invested in "some kinda fruit company" and that Forest "didn't have to worry about money no more." "That's good," Forest said. "One less thing." At one time, the federal government was endorsing a company called Solyndra. Solyndra was a solar panel company. If you ever invested in Solyndra then you probably lost your money because they went bankrupt. Apple stock in 1980 – really good choice. Solyndra stock in 2011 – really bad choice.

I've been thinking about why some folks don't repent. It really is the same question as to why some folks don't believe. Unbelief fights against God's word. Unbelief fights against the truth. Unbelief thinks that Christianity is akin to investing in Solyndra after it went bankrupt. Unbelief does not want to need God. I get the sense that unbelief does not want to lose face and repentance, to them, is exactly that. "I, a poor, miserable sinner..." is just not something that unbelief wants to say. Lose, lose, lose – Solyndra times 10; I can't throw my lot in with those Christian folks because I'll lose my freedom, I'll lose my autonomy, I'll lose my standing with other people and I just don't want to lose.

So, let's compare all that to you. You know what lurks in the darkness and the light of Christ is a joy to your soul. You believe. You find the truth that you have discovered in the Scripture is compelling and you want to live in concert with the truth, in concert with God and His Word. You believe. You're tired of lies; lies in the culture, lies in the media, lies in halls of academia, lies that maybe you told to yourself at one time in order to keep God away from your heart. You believe. God Himself overwhelmed your unbelief by opening the eyes of your heart to the love that He has for you, love which finds its expression and its content in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. You believe. The Holy Spirit has come upon you and faith, born of God's Word, is just as natural to you as breathing. You believe. You know that you are a sinner. You don't hide. You don't lie to God or yourself. You repent. You repent *because* you believe. Truth is truth and repentance is acknowledging the truth.

The unbelieving are unforgiven. The militantly unrepentant are unforgiven. On some level, they know it. The unrepentant lie to God and lie to themselves and then take refuge in something, anything, that helps them to hide from the truth. Here are a few of the top hiding places: Sophistication; the unrepentant believe themselves to be above the lower forms of humanity who seek refuge in God's grace. Other folks hide themselves from the truth by adopting an exalted view of their own sense of justice; the unrepentant believe that their framework for justice is above what they see in the Bible so how could they believe in a God who is less just than they are. Still other folks just don't want to be accountable to anyone or anything. Truth be damned; I'm doing it my way and I'm going to go on doing it my way.

Some folks live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their mind is on earthly things. Their God is their belly and their end is destruction. The church says this with tears (Philippians 3:18-19).

Does repentance hurt you, diminish you, or tarnish you? Does God abuse you like a soulless man who abuses his dog, with repeated beatings, so that you become broken in spirit, broken in mind and heart? Does repentance demean you? Is repentance like throwing good money at a bankrupt Solyndra? Does one lose oneself in repentance or does one find oneself, and, more importantly, discover Christ there, His wounds, His resurrection, His presence, His assurance, His grace? The world will not stop mischaracterizing faith, mischaracterizing repentance, and forgiveness. The world and its empty sophistication has no use for the father of the prodigal son running out to kiss his boy, calling for the fattened calf to be slaughtered, calling for the ring and the robe and the sandals. But you know that feeling, right? You know what it is to be loved by your Father and welcomed by Him. You know that repentance brings you home, brings you light and redemption and peace. You do know that feeling because you believe. Belief and repentance is the evidence that the God of grace is at work in your heart, in your soul.

Would we really give lust free reign in our lives? Would we really advance as a race if greed were unchecked, if we turned our God-given conscience off in regard to hate and theft and deceit? You've struggled with sin. I know it. You know it. You've struggled with approaching life as an autonomous being, lord of your own destiny, living as you saw fit. Many of us here tonight were, at some point, dead in trespasses and sins and God made us alive in Christ, it is by grace that we sit in this holy house, in God's presence, in the sanctuary of Christ's sacrifice. God brought you to repentance. By grace you have been saved. He showed you His Son. God the Father showed you what love is by showing you His one and only Son, crucified for you, dying for you, pouring out His life for you. You are repentant and your heart leaps out to Him. You know who that is on the cross. It is the Son of God; the true and eternal and holy and omnipotent Son of God. And He wills to die for you, to bear your sin and redeem you from death and hell by His blood. That truth is what creates a penitent heart. This is God's work in you – awakening faith and penitence and love that fully embrace Christ and His cross. That is the beautiful reality that is at work in your spirit. That beautiful reality is what leads you to repentance over and over. That beautiful truth holds you and steers you and uplifts you and protects you and empowers you no matter what you face in this life.

We all need to repent and every believer does. God has seen to it that we are invested in His Son. What is *His* return? What is the return on this investment in the risen Savior? You have a *living* hope, don't you? (1 Peter 1:3). The Bible says that you do. A living hope is the priceless confidence that death is not the victor. A living hope is the evergreen knowledge that heaven is your home. It is alive, this hope, this faith. The hope born of faith is your ally in distress. The hope that is in you never lays dormant. It is as dynamic as the Holy Spirit, who is the power behind your living hope. In this world you will be grieved by various trials but the living hope of Christ's blood, Christ's sacrifice is far greater than our trials. Your faith is genuine. Your faith is alive. St. Peter describes you and your living hope this way: "Though you have not seen him you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9). A repentant heart is one of your most sterling virtues. God is the Bishop of your heart. God is the Overseer of all virtue. He has claimed you by repentance and faith.