

## Repent: The First Word of the Good News

Mark 1, Romans 12  
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Web Description: “Repent” is not a popular word. It’s often said with shame and accusation. But when Jesus called people to repent, he was calling them to a life of freedom and joy. In this message, we’ll learn how Jesus’ kind of repentance can bring joy to our lives too.

Welcome

Introduction

A year or two ago I driving downtown St. Paul and I was on Kellogg between the Cathedral and the Capitol. And there were some guys standing on the side of the street holding up signs with religious messages. I remember experiences their messages as being angry, maybe even hateful. I remember wishing that they weren’t there, so that non-Christians would stop thinking of scenes like this when they hear the word “Christian.” I also remember that the key word printed on their signs was a word from the Bible. It was the word “Repent.” **(Display Repent image)**

Then I also asked myself: how often does that work? I kind of feel for those guys. They spend a lot of time out there, and I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone whose life changed for the better because of it. Surely they must be some, but there can’t be many.

But that word was actually a big part of Jesus’ message too. Kind of the headline of his message, actually. (And John the Baptist before him, not to mention a whole string of OT prophets before him) And when Jesus preached this message, lives changed. People followed him. And they found healing, hope, and joy. And a movement began that changed world history.

Is it possible we’re getting repentance wrong??? Is Jesus telling a different story where the word repent means something different from how we usually hear it now?

Let’s open the Bible and take a look. I want to show you a few different things that we can learn about repentance or life change in Jesus’ teaching.

**Repentance is not conditional.**

Some of us think that God will come into our lives if we get our act together. But that’s not the story that Jesus is telling.

Remember Jesus declaration. **“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” Mark 1:15.** --Not “...so that it can come near.” It has come near.

We often think the other way around. We better shape up so that God can work in our lives.

In the ancient world, a town might prepare for the arrival of a King. If they found out the king was coming, they’d be thrilled by the privilege, and they’d clean up the streets.

They’d straighten out what was crooked. The King was coming. They didn’t do it so that the King would come, but because he was on his way.

Do you do this with company at your house? If you’re having company over, you usually look forward to it. And part of getting ready for a dinner party with friends is getting your house in order. But you don’t do it as a condition for them to come. Maybe

if I finally get my kitchen floors clean enough, my friends will finally visit. If that's the case you probably need new friends, you know what I mean?

But we very often we make this mistake in our spiritual life...when I finally get my spiritual house all cleaned up, then God will be able to come and save me. We don't necessarily need new friends in that case; what we need is a new picture of God. The picture of God that Jesus came to be, to embody, and to teach.

God *does* want us to cooperate with his will in our lives, he does want us to clean the house, but it's not a conditional thing.

According to Jesus' message, God is coming into your life, where you are and how you are. And he is coming with grace and good news. Repentance is not a conditional deal.

**Repentance is not optional.**

Sometimes we think, "Well, I'm a Christian. I believe in Jesus. But I'm not one of those people who's going to take it so far. That's fine for other people."

The gospel puts you in a position of no neutrality. In Jesus world, when people heard the announcement that a new King had been crowned, they could respond in one of two ways. Loyalty or disloyalty. There was place for "well, that's interesting. Maybe I'll obey the King's laws...we'll see how it goes." When you hear, The Kingdom of God has come near. When you hear, Jesus is Lord. There's no way to say, "Gee, that's interesting."

Did you ever see the movie Valkyrie. It was a WWII movie about a plot to kill Hitler lead by Colonel von Staufenberg. They thought they had succeeded. The bomb went off, it just didn't kill him. Scene in the telegram office with conflicting telegrams from the leaders of the coup and from Hitler's inner circle, each side claiming victory and giving instructions. At first: Our job isn't to judge or interpret what's coming through. Our job is to transmit it. We're neutral. But eventually, they realized they had to choose. They couldn't send on messages that said opposite things about who was in charge of them and to whom they were loyal. The guy who's second in command says to his boss, "We have to choose. And when we choose, we have to be right." There is no neutral.

Are you neutral on the Reign of God in your life? Are you neutral on Jesus? Maybe he's the way to real life, and eternal life, and joyful and abundant life. But half the time we're sending and living other messages at the same time. We haven't really chosen which way to go. When Jesus said, "The time has come, the Kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news," he reveals that all of us are responding. We're all turning to his way, or we're not. There is no neutral. Repentance isn't an optional thing.

**Repentance is not behavioral.** (...or "only" behavioral. It's going to affect your behavior, but that's not where it really starts.)

Metanoia. A new mind. New thoughts. To repent means to see and think differently from how you saw and thought before.

Rom 12: **"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."** Romans 12:2. ...be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Here's what I think this looked like in Jesus' ministry:

Jesus comes upon this scene of a woman about to stoned to death for a sinful crime. She had been caught as an adulteress. She's surrounded by Pharisees who are about to execute her judgment. But Jesus steps in and holds things up. He doesn't deny what she

has done. It's the truth. Having your mind renewed doesn't mean having your mind erased. But he asks the Pharisees whether they are in a position to judge her. "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." One by one they all walk away. Jesus turns to her and says, "I'm not here to judge you either, which is interesting, because he actually could have. He was the one who was without sin. No nobody knows what was going on in her life that created this sinful relationship. But I'm sure it wasn't good. This woman, disadvantaged in her society, is willing to look for love in the arms of a married man who cannot care for her, cannot provide for her, cannot be faithful to her. She's a perpetrator of a sin and a victim of one at the same time. The Pharisees response was to judge her. Jesus response was to grace her into repentance. By his own actions he opened up her mind to the possibility that somebody actually cared about her and called her into a new life. "Neither do I condemn you. Now go and sin no more." I think that was a metanoia moment, a new mind leading to a new way of living.

The first metanoia moment in all of our lives is when you begin to see yourself as God sees you.

It was a metanoia moment for me when as 16 year old young man full of ambition and motivation and desire to be all that I could be, I realized that my identity could never be secure in what I achieved and that it would always be secure in the God who loves me. That metanoia created for me a desire to live my life for God as a follower of Jesus. It was a transformation by the renewing of my mind.

It was a metanoia moment for a husband I know who told me, "I realized one day that it was part of my calling from God to be a husband and a father and not just a businessman and provider." It changed him.

It was a metanoia moment when my 28 year old friend was told by a community college teacher that God made her smart... and she believed it. She believe for the first time that she was not some dumb accident, she was a creature of the Living God. It changed her.

It is a metanoia moment to stand or sit across a small space from another human being and see them with the eyes and heart Jesus would have. It changes you.

It is the metanoia moment for all of us when we begin to see not just others, but ourselves as God sees us. As sons and ourselves with the Because you know that the Reign of God has come near in Jesus and you live in it.

### **Repentance is a gift of grace.**

Lots of people think there's a contradiction between repentance and grace. And if you understand repentance as a street corner preacher who shouts "Get your lousy act together and start living right," then that's probably true. But if we understand repentance as the opportunity to live life with the mind of Christ and the joy of Christ instead of our own brokenness and hopelessness, then there's no contradiction at all between that and a word of grace.

That picture of a "Repent sign" that I showed you at the beginning of this message came from a blog post I read a while ago. The blog was written as a series of letters from a parent to a child, and the parent who wrote the letters had clearly encountered a kind of repentance that did not fit with grace. They wrote this alongside that image: "**I have never wanted you to know the scary, punishing, mean God I was raised with – the One who scrutinized your every move, kept a scorecard, always got even and made you pay. I wanted God to be a source of comfort, not pain, strength, not fear, and**

**peace, not turmoil in your life. So except for a few... rituals, I shielded you from the yoke of organized religion.”**

Religion can mean a thousand things to a thousand people, and I don't know exactly what it meant to them. But if the yoke of “organized religion” has sometimes been a source of pain, fear, or turmoil for you, or if you have borne some other yoke of pain or burden, then let me tell you what Jesus said. The Jesus who said, “Repent,” also said, **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30.**

i. Repentance isn't performing this or that act of obedience. Repentance is when you realize that life with Jesus is the life God made you for and you find rest for your soul when you walk in his way.

4. Connect to vision and mission of FLC.
  - A. Our mission is to be and make disciples of Jesus. It is our mission to turn from the patterns of thought and action that do cause pain and burden and turmoil; from patterns of thought and action that lead us away from God and turn instead toward the joy of Jesus.
  - B. We're starting a new FLC 101 class this Wednesday, and in our FLC 101 classes, I always ask our potential new member to imagine our future. “Imagine a community of people who just said, ‘Let's live like Jesus. Let's love like Jesus. Let's have the same mind in us that Jesus had.’ How awesome would that place be? How much grace would you experience in a place like that? What impact would that kind of community have on our children, our schools, our neighbors, our culture?”
  - C. Let me make sure you know that the answer is: It would have little or no impact at all if God weren't doing it. It would not be a place of grace at all, if the Kingdom of God were not coming among us by the power of God. But repentance is not conditional. In the teaching of Jesus, we don't repent so that God will come to save to us; we repent because God has come to save us. “The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe this good news.”
  - D. As I close, let me look ahead: Here at the start of 2012, we're going to spend these next three weeks reconnecting and refocusing the mission of Jesus as the mission of our church, culminating on the day of our annual meeting after worship on January 22. In the mail this week, you will also receive a letter clarifying the mission and vision of our church and inviting your renewed commitment to this God given mission. There will be a commitment card with that letter that you can bring back to worship in two weeks as we all turn toward Jesus to repent and believe His good news.

PRAY