

John's Message of Repentance  
Isaiah 40:1-5,  
Advent Sunday II December 7, 2014

Beloved of the Lord.....One of the main things the devil does in in this world is confuse people. When Satan spoke to Eve, he led her to question God's Word. Essentially Satan said, "Did God really say that....Eve?" And so the devil is the author of confusion, but God is the author of peace. When of the common ways in which I have noticed the devil deceives people today, is by denying the necessity of repentance. In other words the devil doesn't want us to repent of our sins but continue in them. For example, there are many so called Christians today who are not repenting of their sins but continuing in them. They are pretend Christians who do not feel the shame of their sins. For example, if you have a so-called Christian friend who is getting drunk every Friday and they do not repent of it and try to change their sinful ways, they are not a true Christian. Likewise if you have a friend who is fornicating with their girlfriend or boyfriend, and they don't repent, they are not a Christian. Likewise if you have a so-called Christian friend who stubbornly refuses to forgive them for this or that, that person is not a Christian but they have fallen.

No person can then be a true Christian without repentance. If you really are a Christian, when you sin and realize what you have done, your heart will smite you and it will hurt. In some measure you will be sincerely grieved by your actions and inwardly your heart will desire God's mercy, God's forgiveness. Repentance takes place when you pray "God be merciful to me, a sinner." While it is true that God doesn't forgive us because we repent, nor does God forgive us because we confess our sins, RATHER God forgives us for the sake of Jesus His Son, IT IS NEVERTHELESS TRUE also that without repentance we will never see heaven. This is because no person can have saving faith in Christ, unless they are first broken by the knowledge of their sins, and God's wrath against them. True repentance thus consists of two parts. FIRST inwardly we realize our sins and confess them, namely we are sorry to God for what we have done. But SECONDLY (and this is crucial), we put our faith in Christ, believing that by His blood God really has forgiven us for all we have done. Faith in Christ, faith in His blood-bought forgiveness is the SECOND HALF of repentance which we dare not overlook. That is why when people came confessing their sins to John the Baptist, He baptized them.....namely he comforted them with the forgiveness of sins given in Baptism. And that is also why when the Pharisees came to be baptized by John, and they did not come confessing their sins, John did not baptize them. God forbids us from casting our pearls before the swine, but we are certainly commanded to comfort God's people, the penitent who are sorry for their sins. So Jesus said in Luke 14, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Let us remember this especially when we commune and receive the very body and blood of Christ, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins."

This brings us now to John the Baptist. During the season of Advent we always hear quite a bit about John the Baptist. The reason for this is Advent is a time of preparation, and only the penitent heart that is sorry for its sins can receive Christ. In like manner John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the people for the coming of Jesus. John's public ministry came just before Jesus' public ministry. In fact one of the last things John did in his ministry was baptize Jesus, and shortly thereafter Herod imprisoned and then murdered John. Likewise after the baptism of Christ, Jesus goes into the wilderness and fasts for 40 days, where He is also tempted. Then His ministry begins. Luke four tells us "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all."

Our question then today is..... How did John the Baptist prepare the people for Christ? The answer is John preached the necessity of repentance. John was "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Now, preparing a straight highway for the Lord does not mean getting a bulldozer to cut a straight road through the desert, but this means we are to straighten out and prepare our own hearts for God. This means REPENT! Change your way of thinking.

Our heart then, according to these verses, is like a desert because it is unfruitful, dry, and barren, not willing to receive God's Word or the Spirit of God. First Corinthians 2:14 thus says "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Even when we are converted and become true Christians, our heart would prefer to expel the Holy Spirit, for our heart is still that inhospitable desert to Him. How much more than when man is unconverted? When the Word of God thus comes to us, we don't like it or want to hear it. Most people avoid church for that very reason. Even our thoughts within are contrary to God. We find every reason to blame God for the problems in our life, or be angry with Him, or something bad happens to us and we charge God with sin rather than confess our own guilt. When you find yourself doubting if the Bible is true, or if you don't like to hear that you are wicked sinner in God's sight who deserves nothing but hell for your sins, this shows how defiant and evil you really are in God's sight. You would rather call God a liar than admit your sin and guilt. Indeed you resist the Holy Spirit so greatly that even when He comes with the Gospel and grace, you still have your doubts. You reason "there must be something that I must do!" But the proof of our barren hearts is also found in our lack of love for neighbor. We are not selfless but selfish. I'd rather my neighbor suffer than me. Likewise we hold grudges and it is not in our nature to forgive. That's why it is easier to hold a grudge than forgive. All these things show how contrary our heart is to God and His Word and His Spirit. Jesus said "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man."

This is why John the Baptist preached, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the

rough places plain.” This means in part God’s judgment is coming. If we are proud men, lifted up in the vanity of our works like a mountain rising up from the ground, God is going to come and judge us and bulldoze us level to the ground. “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before the fall.” Consider the fall of Bill Cosby in the past few weeks. Because of his sins, his world is collapsing. Assuming he is guilty I hope he repents for he is clearly headed for hell. But that can happen to you too. If you think your works are good and you smell like a rose, God can humble you and cut you down like a tree so your whole world falls apart because you refuse to repent. This is why John said to the Pharisees, “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” Those who don’t repent will be judged by the fire of God’s wrath on Judgment Day, as Malachi said, “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts.”

What is truly a miracle then, is that in spite of our inhospitable and contrary hearts, Jesus still comes to us in the Spirit, by the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. That, by the way, is our central thought on the Second Sunday of Advent, that Jesus comes to us in the Spirit, whenever and wherever the Gospel is preached. This Gospel of Christ is both gentle and soft, even like a little child. Likewise Jesus came as a lowly Babe rather than a mighty King. Therefore “Comfort ye, comfort ye, MY PEOPLE, saith your God.” There is comfort here for all who are afraid of God’s wrath. There is also forgiveness here, for all who feel the guilt of sin. There is a phrase which says “You can’t fix broken” or “Broken can’t fix itself.” But God can fix broken. God can fix you. “But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” God can fix you, by healing you, forgiving you all your sins through the precious blood of His Son! Therefore “Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD’S hand double for all her sins.” When Jesus hung and suffered on the cross, He was fighting your battle for you. Jesus waged a holy war right then and there against your sins, your death, and the power the devil had over you. Jesus conquered. Jesus won. And He gives His victory to you freely when He says “Your sins are forgiven, go in peace.” And so if the question is asked, does God want you to go to hell for your sins, you can answer NO, because Jesus is God and Lord, my Savior from all sin. And if it is asked “How many sins did Jesus pay for? You can answer “DOUBLE....double all my sins!” Because “where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.” Now how is it possible then for you to go to hell for your sins, when Jesus tells you in the Gospel He has double forgiveness for you? All you need to do is believe it! The power of His blood then to cleanse you of your sins is infinite. And just think of it....what will your Lord give you today in Holy Communion? He gives you His true body and blood for that very reason, so you can be certain all sins are forgiven, and life everlasting awaits. So Paul said, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” Likewise John the Apostle said, “We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and

we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.”

This is why John the Baptist says, “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.” When the Gospel of Christ comes to us, “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it.” When the Gospel is preached, Christ is seen and His glory, the glory of His salvation. Moreover, every valley is exalted.....the crooked shall be made straight”, when God Himself by the power of His Word works faith into our heart. This valley of our heart is filled with forgiveness. Our crooked path straightens, and Christ Himself become the way, the straight highway to heaven.

Finally beloved of the Lord, don't forsake Christ by unbelief, or refusing to repent of your sins. Repentance for each believer in Christ is ongoing throughout life. Just as the grace of God is a constant for us, for He continually forgives us through Jesus blood, so by this love and forgiveness there is within each believing heart, a kind of constant sorrow for all we have done. Therefore continue to repent of your sins and continue to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, for then thou shalt be saved. “For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. Amen.

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