

What Is Repentance?



Repentance (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you Keys to Successful Living which God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

First, let me say thank you to those of you who have been writing to me. Before I finish this talk, we'll be giving you a mailing address to which you may write. It means a great deal to me to hear how this radio ministry of mine has been helping you and blessing you. So please take time to write—even if it's only a brief note.

This week I'll be talking to you about one specific form of spiritual experience which is a must in the life of everyone of us—a must, that is, if we are ever to know true and lasting peace of mind, and to lead the kind of life that God intends for each one of us. It is an experience which we cannot get around and for which there is no substitute. And yet for all that, it's an experience which is not understood by most people today and which is seldom explained by most preachers.

If I where to offer you several guesses as to the form of spiritual experience I have in mind, I doubt whether many of you would come up with the right answer. It's summed up in one powerful scriptural word: repentance.

So, that's going to be our theme today and through this week—the theme of repentance.

No one in scripture ever placed a greater emphasis on the need for repentance than Jesus Himself. Listen, for instance, to what He says in Luke chapter 13 verses 1 through 5:

> "Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you

> repent you too will all perish.'"

The people, here, speaking to Jesus where describing incidences that were apparently fresh in everybody's mind at that time—dramatic disasters that had come to two groups of people.

The first was a group of Galileans about whom the record says that Pilate had mixed their blood with their sacrifices. I don't believe we have any further details available, but apparently these people were engaged in a religious act of sacrifice. But for some reason, Pilate, the Roman governor had them executed while they were actually sacrificing, so that their own blood was mingled with the blood of the animals that they had offered in sacrifice. This must have appeared a very terrible form of death to the people at the time—to be actually engaged in a religious act of sacrifice and to be executed while performing it. And so the people that were talking to Jesus asked Him, "Had these Galileans done something especially bad that this special disaster came upon them?" But Jesus answered, "No, not necessarily," and then He turned the question around and said to the people who asked Him, "But unless you repent you too will perish."

And then, the second incident was apparently a disaster in which a tower in Siloam had fallen on a number of people and killed them. Now, Siloam is just southeast from the old city of Jerusalem as we know it today. And interestingly enough I was in that area recently. And a guide pointed out the probable base of that very tower that had collapsed on those people in Siloam, referred to in that incident, so that really makes it very up to date.

But the point is that though these two groups of people have suffered especially dramatic deaths which could be viewed as some kind of special judgment of God or a fate upon them, Jesus says, "Don't imagine that your case is any different from theirs in essence. They perished because they had not repented, and if you don't repent, you too will perish."

It may not be that you will have some dramatic death. You may simply die a lingering disease or you may be snuffed out in a moment. That's not the point. The point is there's one essential requirement, which alone can keep us from what Jesus calls "perishing," and that requirement is repenting and that applies to everybody no matter what kind of death they may experience. So in a sense, you could sum up that teaching of Jesus' there in a very dramatic phrase—"Repent or perish." I believe that's exactly what the Bible teaches—"Repent or perish."

Then Jesus continues in that chapter in the next few verses with a parable which is obviously related to this theme of repentance. Then He told this parable:

> "A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'"

See, that's the basic principal—"If it bears fruit, let it live—if it doesn't bear fruit, cut it down." That's God's attitude and relationship to the life of every one of us. God expects good fruit from our lives, and if that good fruit is not found then God's judgment is cut it down. Why should it use up the soil? Make room for something more productive in it's place. So in the parable, the phrase "digging around it" and "fertilizing it" is a dramatic way of representing God's last urgent call to repentance, and if we do not respond to this call than we must suffer the same fate as the fig tree. And it could well be that as you hear these words your life is in that very phase right now. But God says, "Dig it around and fertilize it and we'll give it one more year. And if at the end of that year there's no fruit, cut it down." Repent or perish! Let me burn those words on your mind.

Compare the message of Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist, Matthew 3 verses 1 and 2:

> "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.'"

Then a little further on in the same chapter people went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

> "Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for

> Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.'"

What a dramatic statement. The ax is already laid to the root of the trees. The only way to escape the ax, is to bring forth good fruit. Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit will be hewn down—cast into the fire.

The message of John was repentance. The Pharisees and the Sadducees who were very religious came to him, but John said in effect, "You haven't repented. There's no fruit in your life to indicate repentance. Don't ask me to baptize you. I demand the fruit." And John was God's representative demanding fruit, not leaves. See religion often produces a lot of leaves, but God says, "I want fruit. I want real righteousness, real love, real honesty, real sincerity, real faith toward Me, real commitment of your life, your time, your money—don't just offer me religious leaves. I'm not interested in those. It's fruit I'm looking for. And every tree that doesn't bring good fruit, is going to be cut down and cast into the fire."

The message—repent or perish. Repentance then is something we cannot get around. It's something required of everyone of us. If it's so important, so vital to our well being and our eternal future, we need to know what repentance really is—what does God really require of us. So, I'm going to close this talk today by briefly defining for you repentance.

The first thing you need to understand is repentance is not an emotion, but it's a decision of the will followed by appropriate action. So many people think they have to feel something in order to repent. Many times feeling goes with repentance, but unfortunately many times feeling also goes without repentance. And feeling without repentance is not acceptable. Repentance is a decision of the will. It begins in the will—not in the emotions. So much of contemporary religion is emotion centered and bypasses the will and with the result is we do not have the fruit that God requires in our lives.

There are two words in the Bible basically used for repent. One in the Greek of the New Testament and one in Hebrew, the Old Testament. It's interesting to look at the meaning of each of these words. The word that's used in the Greek means literally "to change your mind." It's a common word in the Greek language which is used by that meaning thousands of times in secular Greek literature. So repentance is changing your mind. You've been living one way now you change your mind and you determine you're going to live another way. It's a change of your whole intention, your purpose of life. The Hebrew word in the Old Testament means "to turn" or "to turn back." I think that's very significant. The difference between Greek and Hebrew. Greek focuses on the inner experience. Hebrew focuses on the outer action. So you change your mind about the way you've been living, and as a result of changing your mind you turn around and start to live a different way. So repentance is a decision of the will, you change your mind, you turn around, you start to live a different way.

Well, our time is up for the day, but I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be explaining why we all need to repent.

Radio Program

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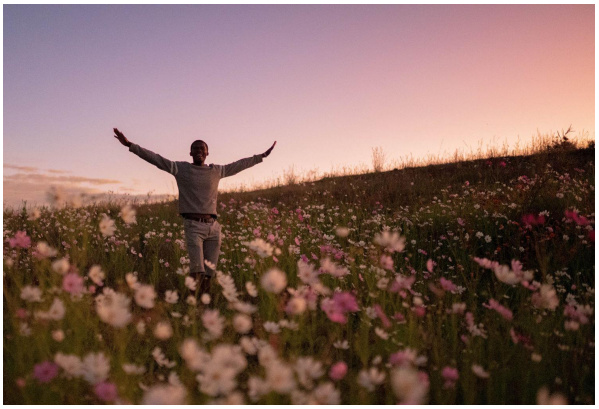

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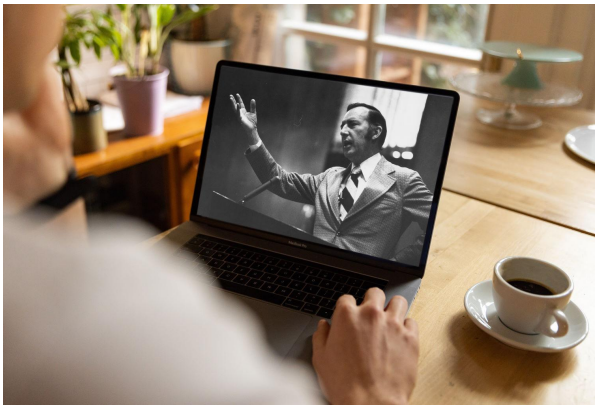

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