

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is Near

October 25, 2009

I. Intro

- a. Have any of you seen the trailer for the movie 2012? It's coming out here in a couple of weeks and the plot focuses on the Mayan prophecy that the world will end December 21st of 2012. It depicts everyone around the world waiting in wonder, curious to see if the prophecy will come true or not. Meteors rain down on the earth causing all sorts of problems, knocking giant buildings down and causing the ocean to rise and flood the land; the White House is demolished by a tsunami. But I have a feeling that the depiction of the people in the movie will be very similar to what it will be like if we should see that day in a few years. The Vatican will be filled with hoards of people; churches filled around the world; people glued to their tv waiting to watch the end of the world take place. It will be another Y2K ordeal where we see the true nature of people. And that is that we are afraid yet fascinated with the end of the world. I mean, think of the movies that have been made: Independence Day, Armageddon, The Day After Tomorrow and the list continues. Humans are fascinated with the end of the world.
- b. So, you can imagine, when we read in Matthew 3:2 how John the Baptist proclaimed the message "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near*" what the crowd's reaction was. Then, add the fact that Christ comes onto the scene. Here is the One they say is the Messiah. And what do we see His message is? Matthew 4:17, "*From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."*" I mean, trying to put myself in that day and age and if I heard the one proclaimed to be the Messiah preach this message, I might be thinking the end of the world is near and I'd hope that I'd take to heart the message He shared, the message of repentance.
- c. Today, I want to take a look at this message that Christ preached throughout His earthly ministry: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

II. Recap: But before we get into that, let's briefly review what we've looked at thus far:

- a. We are in this series of "The Leaven in the Bread"
 - i. We are examining the corruption that has infiltrated the message of the Word.
 - ii. This is why there are so many "gospels" out there today.
 - iii. This is why it is difficult for people to understand the truth of the Word because we have been blinded by our upbringing and what we've been taught to this point.
 - iv. Most pastors don't set out to deceive their congregation. But instead of studying the Scriptures for themselves, they base their entire theology off of what they've heard and what their favorite pastors have taught them instead of examining Scripture with Scripture.
 - v. So this month we have been and will continue to examine common teachings amongst Christian circles which miss the mark.

- vi. The message may not be entirely wrong, but it isn't fully developed. That is our goal. To take these messages, examine the Scriptures and develop them as necessary.
- b. First week we talked about embracing the Justice of God as much as we embrace the Love of God, right?
 - i. We talked about how once we have been saved by the grace of God, God doesn't become this loving God in the clouds that wouldn't harm a fly.
 - ii. Yes, God is loving yet He remains Just. That is why God disciplines us once we are saved so that we will be sanctified, so that we will become holy as He is holy.
 - iii. He knows that we are rewarded or we suffer loss according to how obedient we are to His Word so in His love, He disciplines us and corrects us when we have left the narrow path.
- c. In the second week, we discussed the full message of the cross.
 - i. We looked at the popular message of the cross:
 - 1. Christ crucified and how we see both the love and justice of God working together as God sent His Son to die on the cross in order that we may be covered in His righteousness.
 - 2. We were helpless and lost in our sin but God did not abandon us to eternal damnation.
 - 3. His grace and mercy brought about a way for His righteous wrath to be satisfied, but the ultimate sacrifice, sending His own Son, had to be made.
 - ii. We also then looked at the unpopular message of the cross.
 - 1. Luke 9:23-26 *And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. 25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? 26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*
 - a. Christ, speaking to anyone who wishes to be a disciple. These are saved people, people who have made sacrifices year after year and have been covered by the blood of those animals.
 - b. We are to deny ourselves and take up our cross.
 - c. And we remember the Greek word for deny means to disregard one's own interest.
 - d. We discussed the battle that takes place within us and it is in this way that we are to disregard our own self.
 - e. Let's take a look:
 - i. Galatians 5:17 *For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another.*

ii. And again, a little more in depth look at this opposition, let's look at Romans 7:18-25 *18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.*

- f. So there is this battle going on inside each of us.
- g. We find ourselves in the midst of this war between the Spirit inside of us which desires to obey the Word and desires to serve the law of God while the fleshly nature that still dwells inside us makes us prisoners of the law of sin causing us to act out of the flesh as opposed to the spirit.
- h. It is in this way that we are to deny ourselves and take up our cross as we die to our flesh.

iii. So hopefully, when we see the shiny gold cross, we think of two things: 1) the price Christ paid in order for us to be redeemed and the blood he shed on the cross for our sins and 2) a place where we die daily to our flesh and we carry our cross as followers of Christ, not just admirers.

III. Transition

- a. But what happens when we sin?
- b. What happens when we find ourselves in a similar situation as Paul? When we live according to the law of sin?
- c. I mean, ultimately, hopefully, it is the goal of each of us here to live every moment and make every decision based on the law of God but even then, when we fail and we give into our flesh, where to from there?
- d. That is the topic of discussion for this morning.
- e. Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near

IV. What the modern church message means by these words

- a. Believe and have trust in the blood of Christ because you could die at any time and find yourself being judged to eternal glory or eternal damnation.
- b. There are two ideas here that need to be clarified.
 - i. Is repentance the same as believing?
 - 1. Is this the "requirement" for salvation

2. This is the question we will take a look at here in a few minutes.
- ii. Is the kingdom of heaven the same as Eternal Life
 1. In order to properly answer this, there are many issues we must first deal with, which we simply don't have time to work through this morning.
 2. However, I'm going to answer this and trust you to study it on your own and not take my word for it but go back and examine the Scriptures. There are past sermons on this subject and it is vital to our understanding.
 3. What is the kingdom of heaven?
 - a. Typically, because of ignorance and lack of studying, we believe that eternal life and the kingdom of heaven are one in the same.
 - b. The truth of the matter is typically, when we read about life after this age, it refers to the Millennial Kingdom, not eternal life.
 - c. It refers to the time when Christ will rule during the Millennial Kingdom.
 - d. The kingdom is the next 'event' to take place.
 - e. I want to take a look at our old faithful timeline.
 - f. We look at Genesis and the type set forth:
 - i. God works for six days
 - ii. God rests on the seventh day
 - iii. After the seven days, the eighth day starts a new week
 - iv. As Peter tells us, 1 day to the Lord is as a 1000 years.
 - v. We see God work in history through dispensations.
 - vi. Eternity past up to when He re-creates the world in Genesis 1:2
 - vii. A period where He dealt with humanity as a whole, from Adam to Abraham=2000 years
 - viii. A period where He dealt with Israel from Abraham to Christ=2000 years minus 7 for the 70th week of Daniel
 - ix. A period where He dealt with Gentiles, from Christ to the present day up till His return=2000 years
 - x. A period where He will conclude His dealings with Israel during the time known as the Tribulation, the 7 year period that Israel suffers such loss that they return to God.
 - xi. This leaves the 7th day the only day not accounted for yet. But doesn't it make sense that the day God rested would be the day Christ sets up His kingdom and He rules alongside His Bride?
 - xii. After the Millennial Kingdom, the 8th day, there is a new beginning, eternal life from that moment on.

Just as eternity stretched as far back in time before this 7 Day timeline was set in place, eternity will continue once the timeline is complete.

- xiii. Eternity is simply ages and ages together.
- xiv. But we tend to think that once we die, eternity begins. This is not the case.
- xv. It is the 7th Day that is the Day of the Lord, where Christ rules with His Bride.
- xvi. This is what the kingdom of heaven refers to, not to eternal life.
- xvii. Eternity future begins once the Millennial Kingdom is complete.
- xviii. It is impossible for eternal life to be near if when you look at the timeline, you see that the Millennial Kingdom, the 1000-year reign of Christ must take place first.
- xix. I know this is a lot but it is there in the Scriptures, we just have to dig and find it. But by understanding this, it gives us so much clarity as the Scriptures all of a sudden make sense to us. We no longer have to put a spin on certain verses in order to make them fit our theology.
 - 1. And today's message is one of those areas where things get spun to mean one thing because it doesn't line up with "our" theology instead of us digging deep to understand the truth of the word and not making the text mean what we want it to mean.
 - 2. We are going to take a look at this issue of repentance.

V. Transition: Once of my favorite movies is Indiana Jones the Last Crusade...

- a. Three Challenges Indy must face in order to reach the holy grail:
 - i. The Breath of God-'Only the penitent man shall pass.'
 - 1. feeling or expressing humble or regretful pain or sorrow for sins or offenses-repentant
 - ii. The Word of God-'Only in the footsteps of God shall he follow.'
 - iii. The Path of God-'Only with a leap from the lion's head shall he prove his worth.'
- b. Now, I'm not going to make these my three points to the sermon or create some series out of this, but it is very interesting to me to see these three challenges he must pass in succession, in order to obtain his goal, the holy grail.
- c. Once we are His, once we sin, we must take this path:
 - i. We must be penitent, humbled by our sin.
 - ii. We must then follow the Word of God "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path"

- iii. We must take a leap of faith—we must be obedient to the Word even though it may seem opposite of what our human nature tells us to do; we must lose our life in order to save it. This is a day to day leap that we are taking.

VI. What does it take to obtain Eternal Life

- a. Acts 16:29-32 *The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.*
 - i. The jailer was a gentile. He had never made a sacrifice. His sins had never been covered.
 - ii. Paul and Silas tell the Jailer that he must believe in order to be saved. And the construction of the sentence is, you must believe in Christ and you will be saved and if your family does the same, they will be saved.
 - iii. His family is saved by their own believing.
 - iv. After this we read that they were baptized but that was not a condition for them to be saved eternally.
- b. Ephesians 2:8-9 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—9 not by works, so that no one can boast.*
 - i. Romans 3:28 *For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.*
 - ii. The grace of God. That is it. We must have faith, but other than that, there is nothing we can do to be saved eternally.
 - iii. We cannot become so good that we are saved.
 - iv. To those who say we must repent to be saved eternally, well once we introduce repentance, that becomes a work that we do and we cannot be saved by our own merit
 - v. Sinners who have never been saved, who have never been given the grace of God cannot change their sin nature.
 - vi. They cannot turn from the evil that is in them and do good unless the Spirit is in them.
 - vii. So, when we hear this repent for the kingdom of heaven is near, we must know it is dealing with something other than our eternal salvation.
 - viii. Believing deals with our eternal future.
 - ix. Repentance deals with our rewards or loss of rewards that will be realized at the Judgment Seat of Christ and affect us in the kingdom.
 - x. That is the main idea of this message Jesus went around preaching.
 - xi. I think the one message should be: Believe on the Lord Jesus, trust in His blood to cleanse you from your sin and don't waste time because we aren't guaranteed tomorrow and your belief or lack thereof will have eternal consequences.
 - xii. Once we are saved, the message should be: Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. Quit living according to your flesh but live by the Spirit because Christ may return at any moment and we will find ourselves being baptized by fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ and our works done

in faith, good or bad, will either remain or be burned up. See 1
Corinthians 3:11-15

VII. So, that still leaves us with one remaining question and that is, "What is Repentance?"

- a. A truly stingy painter was hired to paint the local Church a beautiful white on the outside. The Deacons negotiated a price with the painter and he set to work. He thought to himself, "I can make a little higher profit on this job." So he thinned down his paint, so that the paint to do one side, ended up painting the whole building. As he finished and was admiring his work, it began to rain. And it rained. And rained. And rained. And the white paint ran down the sides of the church, and ran off into the sewer. The painter fell to his knees and cried, "Why me, God?" And suddenly, a voice was heard from heaven, "Repaint, and Thin no more!"
- b. The Hebrew word Naw-Kham to sigh, breath strongly, by implication to be sorry. To repent means to make a strong turning to a new course of action. The emphasis is on turning to a positive course of action, not turning from a less desirable course.
- c. The Greek word Met-on-eh-o shed even more light. Strong's writes, "The three steps found in Metanoeo is (1) new knowledge, (2) regret for the previous course, displeasure with self, and (3) a change of action.
- d. Well, as discussed, this is a message for believers, those who have faith.
- e. This is a message for believers who find themselves in Paul's situation. Those of us who struggle between living according to the law of sin and the law of God.
- f. It is to this crowd that Christ preaches "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."
- g. It is only to believers that the offer of the kingdom is even given.
- h. So let's take a look at a couple of scriptures to get a handle on this.
- i. John 13:8-10 *Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." 9 Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." 10 Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."*
 - i. Once we have been saved, we have been washed entirely. Our sins have been removed.
 - ii. The problem is we tend to get dirty. We sin even though we are saved and that sin hinders our relationship with God.
 - iii. Therefore, Christ tells Peter, if his feet aren't washed from time to time, he has no part with Christ, he is not in communion with Him.
 - iv. But I must ask, "How do we get dirty?"
 1. Well, we read the passage in Colossians last week and we've read many others like it other times.
 - a. When we slander, gossip, lust, commit idolatry etc etc
 - b. Instead we are to be clothed in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness etc etc
- j. 1 John 1:6-2:2 *6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus*

His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

- i. This is the same picture we see in Romans with Paul
- ii. We desire to live in the light but we find ourselves walking in the darkness at times.
- iii. So, when we find ourselves in darkness, what do we do?
 1. Well, we tend to want to hide in the darkness as we are too ashamed to come into the light
 2. But we're told to confess our sin and if we do that, we will be forgiven.
 3. Confessing our sin doesn't mean you have to go to confessional and tell the priest all your sins and then he tell you what things you must do in order to repent.
 4. Confessing our sin means you tell God, cry out to Him and say you're sorry. Repenting means turning away from the sin and getting back on the narrow path.
 - a. But can I ask you something?
 - b. Do any of you ever feel like it's to no avail?
 - c. I mean, I find that I tend to struggle with the same sin over and over, not numerous sins just a little bit here and there.
 - d. Do any of you ever feel like me, like why should I repent? Why should I tell God I'm sorry and I'm not going to do that again when in all reality you know that wasn't the last time you are going to commit that sin?
 - e. Well let me encourage you, if you find yourself in that situation, to continue to confess. God knows our heart. I truly am sorry when I sin and it's not always my intention to commit that sin again but invariably, it happens.
 - f. And when it does, you run to the promise of God and confess. That is what this Christian life is all about. You confess because the kingdom is near and it is to our favor to deal with it here and now than at the Judgment Seat of Christ later.
 - g. Sin is disobedience to that which the Lord has commanded. And even though we sin time and time again, cleansing is available. That's why Christ is presently exercising the office of High Priest and not Judge just yet.
 - h. He is up there on our behalf and when we confess, God looks at us and sees the blood of Christ and we are covered in His righteousness.

VIII. Conclusion

- a. Jeff Fisher, Coach of the Tennessee Titans, was at a charity event in Nashville where he was introducing the former Indianapolis Colts head coach Tony Dungy. Now, the Titans have started this season 0-6 and haven't lived up to their high expectations after going 13-3 last season. Fisher, came up to the podium and as he did so, he took off his button-up collared shirt to reveal a #18 Peyton Manning jersey, the all-star quarterback for one of his Titan's big divisional rivals. As he stepped toward the mic, he commented on how he just wanted to be a winner. Now, while the crowd clapped and laughed and enjoyed the joke, you can imagine the reaction he got from his players and team and fans. Later, he issued the following statement:

"It was for a very, very worthwhile cause, charity. I was introducing Tony, just having fun with it and I really apologize if I offended anybody, but if you're offended over the nature of that type of thing, then I think you need to rethink things. This is a very worthwhile and needy benefit and I was honored to be there. ... I'm sorry if I offended anybody but if I had to do it again, I would do it again."

 - i. I do not bring this up to say he was wrong or right or say he should have been loyal to his team and not knock them when they are down. My point in telling this is to ask the question, does this seem repentant to you?
 1. He says he is sorry but follows that with "If I had to do it again, I would do it again."
- b. "Repentance is a decision to want freedom more than bondage."
- c. Repentance is more than just being sorry.
- d. Being repentant isn't the same as being remorseful. As Kent Crockett said, "Remorsefulness is sorry for the past, but doesn't want to change the future. Repentance is also sorry for the past, but makes a change in heart so the future will be different. It changes future behavior so the past mistakes won't be repeated."
- e. Romans 2:4b "the kindness of God leads you to repentance"
- f. You see, God, in His love, has His Spirit convict us when we sin. He gives us that nudge to come clean.
- g. God knows that the kingdom of heaven is at stake for believers, the Spirit is searching for the Bride and it is those who confess their sin and repent who will undoubtedly make up that Bride and rule and reign with Christ in that Millennial Kingdom.
- h. While those who are stubborn in their hearts, as we saw Israel last week, they will be given over to their own devices and lose their inheritance.
- i. Indiana Jones may have had it right, "Only the penitent man will pass"