

Today we turn to one of Jesus' most famous sermons, His Sermon on the Mount. We don't know for sure which mountain this was on. The text simply says "He went up on a mountain."

Tradition suggests that it was a mountain just on the North side of the Sea of Galilee. We'll just call it the **Mount of Preaching**: Where Jesus Teaches with Authority

Our text is not actually part of Jesus' Sermon, but Matthew's introduction and summary of the sermon.

"And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. 2 Then He opened His mouth and taught them.

28 And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, 29 for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We all like to evaluate sermons. We think, that was a really good sermon, or that one didn't didn't really do much for me. When Jesus finished His Sermon on the Mount, everyone agreed, that was a GOOD sermon. They were amazed. They had never heard a sermon like that before. Jesus taught with authority unlike the Scribes and Pharisees, and everyone was affected deeply by it. It is interesting, this sermon is almost all Law and the Jews were all about the Law of Moses or the Torah, as they called it. Their whole religion was essentially about the law. But they had never heard the law like this before. The people had been taught that the Law of God was something they could keep and be saved. They thought keeping the law was how they showed God they were righteous so He would be pleased with them and bless them.

The Scribes and Pharisees were the best examples of keeping God's law. They meticulously followed the smallest detail, mostly details that they had added to God's law. They were the most righteous of the people. But now Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." This was shocking. How could anyone be more righteous than the Scribes and Pharisees? More than that, Jesus said, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

The problem was the Scribes and Pharisees taught the law only dealt with outward action. Jesus taught the full intent of the Law. The 5th commandment says, "You shall not kill." The Jews believed as long as they didn't actually kill anyone they had kept this commandment. Jesus taught that if you are angry with someone or even call them a derogatory name you are already guilty of breaking this commandment.

6th Commandment says, "You shall not commit adultery." Again they thought as long as they didn't have an illicit affair they were holy in God's eyes. Jesus said if you just look at a woman and have lustful thoughts you are already committing adultery in your heart.

And on it goes. It is not just outright stealing that is a sin, but greed in the heart and the love of money is already a sin. Worrying about what you will eat and what you will drink and what you will wear shows a lack of trust in God and can lead to a desire to get more by dishonest means. Jesus even indicates that if you do not love your enemies, and bless those who curse you and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, then you are not sons of your Father in heaven. God's law requires absolute purity in heart and mind. Every sin begins in the heart and so anger, envy, greed, lust, selfishness are all sins against God.

Jesus is teaching us that the law of God was not given as a way that we could show God that we are righteous and earn His favor. Rather the law is meant to convict us and to show us that we are NOT righteous. We are all guilty before God.

What makes a truly good sermon? It's one that moves you to God pleasing action. Jesus said at the end of His Sermon on the Mount that the one who hears these words and doesn't do them is like a foolish person who builds his house on the sand. Jesus preached the full intent of the law in order to bring people to repentance. To hear the law convict us of our sins and not repent is truly the greatest foolishness. It is the primary fruit of genuine faith. Without repentance a person doesn't really have saving faith.

This week I read an article about repentance on the internet and it was terrible. It made several good points from Scripture, but it puts a slant on it to become something we have to do to gain God's forgiveness rather than a fruit of faith. And it perverted the purpose and need for repentance. So, it occurred to me that it would be worth reviewing what repentance is and how to do it.

The dictionary defines repentance as "*feeling or expressing sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin.*" But that is only part of true repentance. The Greek word for Repent is *Metanoeo*. It means to have a change of mind. The thing you once thought would bring you pleasure you now hate. You see it as an assault on God and the cause of Jesus' suffering and you want nothing to do with it anymore. So it does bring remorse for having done it. But remorse or regret is not the same as repentance. Many people feel remorse when they see the consequences of their actions, but they are not sorry that they sinned against God. Judas had great remorse for betraying Jesus. He felt so bad about it that he killed himself, he couldn't bear the guilt, but he didn't repent. As a result he wasn't saved. That shows how important repentance is. It is the sign of true faith and the only way we receive God's forgiveness from his hand.

There is a beautiful passage in the Old Testament that nicely describes true repentance without even using the word. It is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14. When Solomon dedicated the Temple to the LORD, God promised, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." This verse describes four parts of true Repentance.

First He says, if His people "will humble themselves." That is the beginning of true repentance. Pride is the biggest obstacle to true repentance and faith. Human nature always wants to think of ourselves as good and right. So when people are confronted with their sin, some get angry and fight back like the priests and Pharisees when the Apostles said they killed the Son of God. Others admit that they did it, but it wasn't their fault. Like Adam and Eve, they claim someone else made them do it. Repentance begins with humbling ourselves before God. That's why Jesus began this sermon on the Mount by saying, "Blessed are poor in spirit." Those who humbly acknowledge that they have no spiritual goodness to offer God. They readily admit, I am guilty. It was my fault. They don't try to show God how good they are, but rather plead for His mercy. This humbling ourselves and being poor in spirit leads to the genuine sorrow that we associate with repentance. It is not just being sorry about the consequences of our sin. It is the genuine sorrow that you have violated God's holy commands, and caused the bitter pain and suffering of our Savior. That is what Jesus is talking about when He says, "Blessed are those who mourn." Those who humble themselves before God and are poor and spirit and who mourn over our sins, they are the ones who are truly blessed. They receive the kingdom of heaven and are comforted, not those who think they are holy.

God mentions the second part of Repentance. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray..." It is not enough to feel bad about what we have done. Repentance involves praying to God, telling Him we are guilty and that we are sorry for having sinned against Him. That is what the Bible calls confession. That article I mentioned made it

sound like the only time we need to confess our sins is when we know we have committed some sin. But the vast majority of our sins are in our thoughts and attitudes and most of the time we are not even aware of them. Therefore we often confess our sins in a general way. Please forgive all my sins. But if we know of some sin in particular that we have committed, we need to confess that sin specifically.

The third part of repentance is to seek God's face. "If my people, who are called by my name, will **humble themselves and pray and seek my face**..." Repentance is an act of faith. This is actually an amazing part of repentance. Just think about little children. When they know they have done something their parents told them not to do, they don't want to look their parents in the eye. They keep their head down and will do anything to avoid looking at their parents face. Isn't that still true of us adults. If you have really wronged someone it is very difficult to look that person in the eye? But that is what God wants us to do. There is no point in trying to hide our sins or turn away from God's face, first of all because He already knows what you have done including the sins of your heart and mind. Secondly, we don't need to hide from His face because He has already paid for your sins and promises to forgive. As the Apostle John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

We seek His face because we long for His forgiveness and be restored to a right relationship with Him. That is what Jesus is talking about when He says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." We long to receive the righteousness of Christ because we know we don't have any righteousness of our own. When we seek His face in this way, we will see His face smiling upon us in love. And we will be filled with the righteousness of Christ.

There is one more step of true repentance. God says, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and **turn from their wicked ways**." This is not what makes repentance genuine, as that article suggested, but it is the natural result of genuine repentance. So it is evidence that the repentance is genuine. Remember repentance is a change of mind or heart. If you truly have a change of heart so that you hate the thing that you have done, you will turn away from that thing. If you say you are sorry but then keep right on doing the same thing, that is not a sincere repentance, you are not really sorry and you have not really repented. Repentance and forgiveness doesn't mean we can keep on sinning and then ask for forgiveness. That is not repentance.

On the other hand, we may find that we do commit the same sin over and over again. Sometimes we find some sins that we just can't seem to overcome. That doesn't necessarily mean that you haven't truly repented of that sin. The problem is that we still have our sinful nature that does still desire the sin. Our spirit may hate the sin but our flesh still loves it and so that battle goes on like Paul describes in Gal. 5:17, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." But Paul also says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." So true repentance often includes a prayer for God's strength to resist that sin.

A truly good sermon leads to God pleasing action, in this case it is repentance, which is an important theme of Lent. So the rest of Jesus' Sermon on the mount is meant to make us "Poor in Spirit," and to lead us to mourn over our sins. It is meant to convict us of our unrighteousness so that we will hunger and thirst for His righteousness which only can make us acceptable to God. But it doesn't end with action on our part. A truly good sermon also bestows God's blessing. When Jesus leads us to repentance we will be truly blessed as God promises, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal

their land.” God does forgive completely, as He tells Jeremiah “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” Jer. 31:34. That forgiveness also comes with blessing, “I will heal their land.” God loves to shower His goodness upon us. When we live as His people in humble repentance and faith seeking always to do His will, we will enjoy His blessings now and forever.

Amen.