

Repentance and Brokenness

Every week I come here to this church and preach a message of hope, inspiration and encouragement to change. Week after week we talk about Jesus and the good things that are happening in our community. We discuss the nature of God, what his will is, how to hear from him. I see before me each week many people that are outstanding and Godly. Yet day by day, week by week and year by year people are falling away from the kingdom of God. There is a mass exodus of preachers from the ministry.

Do you ever grow tired of hearing these messages? Have you ever thought to yourself, my goodness, I wish he would just shut up so we could get out of here and have lunch?

How many of us come to church week after week and listen to the pastor tell us about God and sincerely want to try to do all those things that we hear from the pulpit? How many of us sincerely follow God and yet being honest with ourselves are simply tired of trying?

I have seen this over and over again over the years and I have seen various means of coping with it. Some people engross themselves in spiritual busyness. It may not be fulfilling but they feel like they are accomplishing something. Others deal with it by carrying a hidden deep sense of failure. If this is you perhaps you have felt: “Everyone else seems to be getting this... so why is this not working for me?”

Want more shocking revelation? After years of preaching the truth is that we as pastors, teachers, leaders may in fact contribute the state of spiritual fatigue.

I am going to pause here for a collective gasp...

Think about what I am talking about for a minute, I have an answer so bear with me, but first let me say that I believe that preaching and teaching are necessary, but let's consider some aspects here.

Each Sunday we come in a fill our sermons with amazing principle centred teaching that is designed to point you to all the goodness that God has for you. It is in fact the sincerest desires of our hearts. My heart specifically that you are each individually and collectively connected to God in an ever deepening pattern of spiritual growth.

I may come in on Sunday and preach things like:

- Four strategies to improve your married life
- Five simple secrets to prayer
- How to be more loving to those around you

These are amazing topics and some of it is gleaned in the first, second or perhaps third time it is preached. But here is what I personally have observed and experienced.

What happens to this helpful information and all the amazing principles taught? What is the long term impact when a person listens to a sermon and they look inside and being honest with themselves realize that they haven't mastered the four strategies to improve their married life from last week and now the pastor is adding five more points to master on how to pray?

I am not being condescending, I am talking from experience. When you are trying to apply a principle into your life, I can say for me personally at least it can take more than a week and if I am constantly getting more and more changes added week after week, I can get spiritually fatigued and quite honestly frustrated with my own progress. Folks we can become literally as the bible puts it weary in well doing.

So why do we preach like this? It is a method I call spray and pray.

Here is the truth, it resonates with so many people. Some driven people like to work hard on these lists of perfection and find themselves progressing, but also may find themselves in a trap of spiritual pride. When I grabbed what my pastor said and worked hard at it, I felt good about myself. I can honestly say I felt closer to God, because I was seeking him with my whole heart, I was putting all my energy into doing his will.

Here is the problem folks, when we try to do this of our own strength we get tired, and we can start to feel worn out. In our fatigue we can start to feel despair or even disillusioned. How many have tried time and time again and failed and harbour a deep sense of guilt or shame.

If you have ever felt like this you have two human paths open to you, resolve to try harder or give up all together and live an apathetic Christian walk.

So we need to ask ourselves what is the answer. After all Phil 4:13 says we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. What do we do?

Let me say this to start with, principle lead preaching is here to stay but how we manage our expectations and not become spiritually fatigued? Or if we are fatigued, how do we find our road back?

We resolve that each time we hear the word preached it is not a task for the week but change our perspective. Christianity is preached to the lost so that they can be found, but you my brothers and sisters and in a lifelong relationship with a very graceful and patient God who loves you. While it is true, so very true that we need to absorb, adopt, and apply the principles that we hear, there is a technique that I use and I am going to share with you this morning that I hope you will take away from here this morning as Gold.

The Gospel is not just for the lost who need Jesus it is for all Christians...

Before the "Well Duh's!" start let me explain.

As Christian brothers and sisters we need the Gospel just as badly. It is not simply the start of Christianity, it is your entire walk as well.

Some may think: 'that's all well and good pastor, but can you be more specific?' the good news is yes, yes I can.

Here is the crux of today's message...

Repentance and faith in Jesus are continual activities, not just one time, initial responses to the gospel. Repentance is a word that is unpopular, it can seem oppressive and negative. The truth is that as children of God, when we come back and say God I am sorry, please help me as I try to apply a principle, actually takes a load off of us. It puts the yoke squarely on God as our strength. Repentance is not something we do just when we severely mess up, it is in fact a liberation from the oppression of our perceived failure. Repentance to God is not from condemnation or oppression it is in fact liberating and life giving. This is not a message that fills Churches, but it is a message that allows a Christian to understand that the Gospel is liberating and freeing.

Wow that seems a bit radical doesn't it?

Matthew 5:3: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus is talking about repentance here.

When we are poor in spirit we become aware of the depth of our brokenness before God. We begin to recognize the actual depth of our needs.

NOTE: Just like all the other beatitudes, this is not a one time thing but rather a continual response.

When we look at the gospel we begin to see where we are really at. We start to see how much we need the gospel in all of our spiritual activities and our Christian walk.

Let me give you an example...

As a pastor I have had people say: Great message today pastor, or Great sermon preach!. And various other things like that. It feels pretty good to hear those things as one might expect. Years ago as a student and I had a chance to preach, I remember thinking about a few members of the congregation I was in at the time who may have been away for that message.

I remember thinking: "Hum, I know our youth leader would have really benefited from this message today, it ticks me off that he didn't show."

Guess what God said to me: "Ray, is it about you and your desire to have him hear your "awesome" message. Who are you glorifying? Why did you deliver this word? Was it for them or you?"

To this day, I still say: "Ouch!" That really hurt! I thought it was for God, but I trapped myself in my own pride. I realized, I needed to repent. Not just say sorry, but not do it again. I came to realize that I once again needed the gospel. We as Christians need to examine and reexamine our motives.

Why am I telling you this embarrassing story about myself as a Bible School student? Because I want each person here to know that even with the best intentions we can become self-centered.

In for a penny in for a pound as the saying goes...

What else did I learn that I need to share this morning...

Here is my second revelation. I used to think of sin as doing bad things, evil things or not obeying the 10 commandments. Many of us would say when using that yard stick that we do not sin. But I have come to realize that sin is not being in the will of God.

As people so often we replace God with ourselves or other things as the centre of our lives.

Do we put our reputation above God?
How about our attractiveness to the opposite sex?
What about our success in our jobs?
How about the square feet of our houses?

When we define sin this way, several things start to happen:

- Breathing in this room stops
- The sound of a pin dropping becomes audible

Folks, I started to feel pretty broken, apathetic and spiritually exhausted until I came to realize that all I needed was to re-embrace the good news of the Gospel.

Repentance is not preached because it is perceived as the fastest way to decrease the size of a congregation that their can be. Nobody wants to repent. This is why so many of our churches today don't preach on repentance, or hell or consequence etc. These topics are avoided if you want your church base to grow.

Now here is the truth and what I believe. I would rather have a church who hears the unvarnished truth of the gospel. A church that is healthy. A church that is not apathetic or spiritually fatigued to the point of inactivity than a church that has drifted from the truth, from God and from spiritual growth.

Here is the most important thing... When we recognize our brokenness a door opens. In our weakness he is made strong. And in us we find his strength. Our faith is built on the truth. Real healing takes place. That which has faded down to an ember reignites and faith abounds.

So may embrace faith only in times of difficulty but Paul tells us in Romans 1:17 "For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. He said from first to last. The entire Christian walk is about faith. We are to live by faith. It is impossible to please God without faith. In short, We are to have faith in Christ alone.

So Brokenness and repentance is important. If we don't truly see the depth of our need, if we refuse to be honest with ourselves, will we truly depend on Christ or will we keep trying to do it on our own and become weary, ineffective and apathetic. Today, I declare that I need a saviour, that saviour is Jesus and though I preach and try my best to follow godly principles, my perspective today has changed.

Today, you can try on your own to apply the message from God's word every Sunday and be self-sufficient, or like I discovered in my brokenness I am Christ-Sufficient.

When you do this, it becomes simple:

- This is what the bible says

- Here is what it means
- Go and do what it says

if you fail, go right back to God, repent and have faith.

Because the ultimate truth is you have an amazing saviour who wants you to have an abundant life of joy.