

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen**

**Third Sunday after Trinity (2022)**

**Repentance, the Sinner's Response**

**Rev. Toby Byrd**

*“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance . . . so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:7, 10, ESV)*

The Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin end with our Lord Jesus saying, *“there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance”* and *“I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:7, 10, ESV)* In these two sayings Jesus, against the hard-heartedness of the Pharisees, is defending His desire to welcome sinners. He does so because He has one burning desire, to restore the sinner to the community of the kingdom of God.

In the parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus paints a picture of a shepherd tending his flock. Suddenly he realizes that one of the flock is missing. It may be only one lamb out of a hundred, but it is one of his lambs. So he leaves the ninety-nine and immediately begins a search for the lost one. For this shepherd there is no option, he must seek the one that is lost, it must be found and returned to the flock. It is alone in a world filled with wolves and other predatory creatures. If he ignores its wandering, there is little doubt that the lamb will come to a terrible end. So, let's go and find it and return it to the flock.

In beginning this parable Jesus asks the Pharisees, *“What man of you.” (Luke 15:4, ESV)* What man of you would do the same thing? Are you willing to drop everything and seek after the lost? Are you willing to submit yourself to hardship or danger to restore one sinner to the temple of God? Or are you content that there are ninety-nine that did not stray?

This is a serious question for these Pharisee's to ponder. While contemplating Jesus' question we might ask, did the Pharisee see themselves more as one of the ninety-nine and not as the shepherd? Above all others, the Pharisee's consider themselves to be completely righteous, above reproach, even sinless. Thus, as righteous ones they would never stray, they would never leave the flock, they would always stay in the Temple, feeding on God's Law?

For the Pharisee it was impossible for him to do anything that would put into question his faithfulness to God. Straying from the flock would be a sin, and he would never do that. So being sinless and self-righteous there was no reason for him to consider Jesus' admonition to repent. Indeed, it was this very mindset that emboldened the Pharisees to reject John's call for baptism and his call for repentance. When Jesus was expounding the qualities of John the Baptist, Scripture tells us, *(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)” (Luke 7:29–30, ESV)*

As they listen to Jesus tell this parable, they know He is directing it at them. They know that everyone needs to repent, and they remember the words of John the Baptist who said to them, *“You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’*

*for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.” (Matthew 3:7–9, ESV)* Oh but the Pharisees relied completely on their pedigree, the fact that they were children of Abraham.

So, too, today, there are many who rely on their pedigree, their self-righteousness, insisting they are free from sin, indeed sinless. But we know that there is no such thing as a sinless person, one who has no need of repentance. St. John reminds us, ***“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:8–10, ESV)*** So when the Pharisee and the self-righteous reject John’s call for repentance, they reject God’s plan of salvation in Christ Jesus.

This parable reminds us of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee, smug, arrogant, self-righteous, thought he had no need of repentance, he even thanked God that he was not a sinner like the tax collector standing next to him. However, the tax collector was just the opposite, he knew he was a sinner, he admitted he was a sinner, and he came into God’s house, humbly admitting his sin while seeking forgiveness. The tax collector was contrite, repentant, sorry for his sins, sorry that his sins had grieved God and in humble repentance he sought God’s pardon.

Repentance is a word that is often misunderstood or rejected. For many, to repent, or to be repentant, is nothing more than a shallow, outward attempt to express sorrow. Oh not because they have sinned against God, but because they were caught. There is no true sorrow, or contrition for having offended God or for having harmed their neighbor. Their primary concern is that they were called out for their offense. What they consider to be repentance is nothing more than an effort to preserve their reputation. This is not repentance. Thus, the unrepentant act like Pharisee’s, putting themselves above God while relying on their own faulty understanding. But repentance or to be repentant according to Word of God has a much deeper meaning than the shallowness of man’s understanding.

The Greek word “μετάνοια,” repentance, means literally to change one’s way of life by a complete change in thought and attitude regarding sin and righteousness. Change regarding your willingness to place God before yourself. Knowing that when you sin you offend God the Father who has created you, God the Son who gave His life for the forgiveness of your sins, and God the Holy Spirit who gave you the gift of faith so you could repent. This explanation trumps all other understandings of repentance. It places the correct relationship of man to God regarding sin. Man’s sin angers God, it is offensive to Him, it carries the penalty of eternity in the fire of hell. Who, that call themselves followers of Jesus Christ, would not repent? Who, that call themselves followers of Jesus Christ do not desire to live lives pleasing to God, and when they come up short and sin, would not get on their knees and beg God for forgiveness? Not just for the forgiveness of their sin, but also ask the Holy Spirit to continue to lead them in the way of righteousness for the sake of Jesus Christ, turning them that they may walk with God and not with the world. Turning them one-hundred and eighty degrees, leading them in the opposite direction, not in the way they were headed but instead in the direction of God.

Why, some ask, do we need to repent? Some call the eternal punishment of God into question, asking, “Is not God love and mercy? Has not God forgiven all mankind in Christ?” Yes, God offers forgiveness to all who come to faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the Altar of the Cross, but in this world the corrupted flesh still clings even to believers and thus they are in constant danger of forgetting the guilt and punishment of sin. Thus, the Law is necessary and salutary to point out sin even to believers. Through the preaching of the Law, they are ever reminded of what would be the inevitable consequence of their sins, if they did not by daily

repentance continue in the spiritual life and crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. Therefore, believers should pray every day Holy Father, ***“teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12, ESV)***

When this purpose is attained, when men are brought to the reality of their sinfulness, then in repentance and in faith they flee to Christ, their Redeemer from sin, death, and the devil and are consoled to the Word of God. St. Paul tells us, ***“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:4, ESV)*** and our Lord Jesus said, ***“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” (John 3:18, ESV)*** When you repent it means you not only have knowledge of sin, but that you also have faith in the forgiveness of sin. Repentance leads to forgiveness; judgement is set aside. Luther said, ***“The judgment is abolished; it concerns the believer as little as it does the angels... All believers pass from this life into heaven without any judgment and will even be the judge of others.” (St. L. VII: 1974, 1975.)*** Repentance brings joy to heaven. Jesus reminds us, ***“I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” (v. 7)***

Jesus told His apostles, ***“That repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:47, ESV)*** This statement by Jesus brings us great joy and comfort. Here He assures us of our eternal election because of His universal grace. Without faith in this universal grace our election is placed in doubt. But the preaching of repentance and forgiveness shows us that the promise of universal grace through the Gospel pertains to all men. Who would not want to repent given this truth of God’s Word?

So don’t be a Pharisee, don’t say “I have the pedigree of my family, my church, my reputation, these will save me from the fires of hell.” They won’t. Instead, do as Jesus said, ***“Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.” (Luke 3:8, ESV)*** Do as St. Paul said, ***“repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with . . . repentance.” (Acts 26:20, ESV)*** Also remember, when things are looking hopeless, when you find repentance difficult and you’re asking yourself, ***“Who then can be saved?”*** remember what Jesus said, ***“With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26, ESV)***

As the Gospel Reading shows, restoring one lost sheep to the flock brought great joy to the shepherd and it also brings joy to the village, the church. Having found his lost sheep, the shepherd returns home and invites the community to share with him his joy. This rescue, this reunion, which our Lord Jesus likens to one sinner who repents, brings great joy to heaven. When one sinner is found and restored to the community of God’s fellowship it brings great joy to the community, for a brother or sister who was lost has been found, forgiven, and returned to their rightful place. This is the main point in the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. Joy! For one who was lost has been found and restored to the flock, to the kingdom of God.

Moreover, these parables reveal the true purpose of the ministry of Jesus: calling sinners to repentance. This, too, is the purpose of Christ’s called and ordained under-shepherds, His pastors, calling sinners to repentance through Law and Gospel preaching. It is a ministry which follows in the footsteps of the Great Shepherd, Jesus, who said, ***“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance . . . For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 5:32; 19:10, ESV)*** In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.