



World Christian Fellowship

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Matthew 3:9 Abraham and Repentance.

Matthew 3:7-12, *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”⁸ Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,⁹ and do not think to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.¹⁰ And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.¹¹ I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.¹² His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”*

Matthew is presenting Jesus Christ as the king in his Gospel. Not only as the king, but as the king of kings. Not only as the king of kings, but as the anointed of God.

God promised His people a saviour.
God promised them a messiah, a king.

Even throughout the time of Israel's moral and spiritual decline,
Even throughout the time of Israel's corruption,
Even throughout the time of Israel's chastening,

The Holy Spirit continued through the mouth of the prophets to speak about the coming of the King, the Messiah, the Christ.

Hope was always kept alive, at least in the hearts of the godly remnant.

The Holy Spirit used men like

- ✓ Isaiah,
- ✓ Jeremiah,
- ✓ Ezekiel,
- ✓ Joel,
- ✓ Zechariah and
- ✓ Malachi

To sing over again and again the songs of the splendour of the King and of His coming kingdom.

For those that were godly, it was heard, and it was believed, and the anticipation filled their hearts. This went on throughout all of Israel's history until the great silent period after Malachi.

The Old Testament ends with the prophecy of Malachi. That was the end of the prophetic voice as far as the history of God's people is concerned.

Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, ends with this prophecy.

Malachi 3:1, *“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts.*

Malachi 4:4-5, *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. ⁶ And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”*

The last statement of the Old Testament is that there was going to come a man who would be really in the spirit and power of Elijah. He would turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God and that was really a prophecy of John the Baptist.

So that the Old Testament ends with a statement about the coming of John the Baptist, the New Testament then begins with the ministry of this man.

In between is this 400-year period of silence from Malachi to John the Baptist there was no God-inspired voice spoke the message of the Messiah.

There was no voice about the coming kingdom of righteousness and of peace. But just as suddenly as the silence began, just so suddenly was it broken by the powerful and bold preaching of a desert prophet by the name of John the Baptist.

Matthew 3:1, *In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,*

John the Baptist hit the silent sky like a comet. He was the first prophetic voice in 400 years and his message was the most anticipated of any message that could ever be delivered.

His message was the kingdom of heaven is at hand, the King is coming, the thing for which Israel had hoped, the anticipation of the kingdom, the One which they had longed to see - the King Himself was near.

John the Baptist was the messenger of the King. He was the announcer. He was the forerunner.

Matthew wrote his entire gospel to present Christ as King. Matthew knows that all kings have a herald. All kings have an announcer. All kings have a forerunner or someone who straightens out the path, who gets things ready for his arrival.

Consequently, Matthew goes to great lengths to introduce to us this herald in order that he might affirm from another angle, that indeed Jesus Christ was a king.

Like any king, He had a Messenger/herald, and not just any herald, not just any forerunner, but according to **Matthew 11:11**, John the Baptist was the greatest man who had ever been born up until his time.

Indeed, a great man. So, Matthew introduces us to John because it fits his theme.

John's message was the message of repentance, the message that was needed to get Israel ready.

Because the tragedy of the matter even though the King was coming and the kingdom was imminent, the people were not ready, and the people could not receive the kingdom.

There was sin in Israel. Israel was lost.
Israel was no different than Gentiles at this point.

That is why John preached a baptism, because baptism was the right which a Gentile proselyte went through to become a part of Israel.

John was saying that Israelites are on the outside looking in.

- The good news, the King is coming.
- The bad news is that they are not ready.
- They got to be converted.

The word “repentance,” literally, is “converted.”

Got to be transformed.

Got to turn their life around and get ready for the King or else they will not be able to receive His kingdom.

It was bad news that John preached before it was good news that he announced.

The bad news is that mentioned here.

Matthew 3:2, and saying, *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”*

The good news, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. That was the twofold message that John preached.

Before the kingdom could be received, repentance had to occur!

Before they could ever enter into the place of blessing and be a part of what God had planned, the kingdom, they had to come to a place of conversion/transformation, 180-degree turning around, away from their sin, a fundamental change in their relationship to God and the way they were living their lives.

It was to be symbolized by baptism, the symbol of Gentile proselytes entering Judaism. The Jews were outsiders. This was a shocking message. So, repentance keyed John's message.

Repentance is an important thing.

It is a great biblical truth.

The great theologian Eric Sauer gave us a good summation of the thought of repentance.

"Repentance is a threefold action.

In the understanding, it means knowledge of sin.

In the feelings, it means pain and grief.

In the will, it means a change of mind,"

All three must be there.

In general repentance involves,

- ✓ First, insight in the mind, understanding.
- ✓ Secondly, despair in the emotions or the feelings.
- ✓ Thirdly, a change of life/pattern, turning around, coming to the place where you see the truth in your mind.

You cry out to God like the apostle Paul.

Romans 7:24, *O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

You have despair and then you remove all self-redemption possibility, and you turn around. Become totally dependent upon the grace of God.

We know in the New Testament that redemption is presented as a gift. God has granted redemption!

2 Timothy 2:25-26, *in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,²⁶ and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.*

It is a gift from God. God grants this gift in a threefold measure.

1. Intellectual

Repentance begins when there is a knowledge of sin.

When there is a recognition of sin redemption begins there.

So, John, like any good preacher of repentance, confronted people with sinfulness.

There had to be an understanding of sin involving a sense of

- personal guilt,
- defilement, and
- helplessness.

All three of these are illustrated very aptly in **Psalm 51**.
We see the intellectual element of repentance.

David's repentant heart crying out to God after his terrible sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah. He committed adultery with Bathsheba and then in order to eliminate her husband he got him out in a battle and instructed his soldiers to get him in the heat of the battle and then leave him there until he was killed. In response to that, his heart is broken, and he repents.

But first is the intellectual part.

Psalm 51:3, *For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me.*

Psalm 51:7, *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

Psalm 51:11, *Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*

Now, in all three of those verses is a recognition of sin.

Verse 3 explicitly, *"For I acknowledge my transgressions, my sin is ever before me."*

Verse 7 and 11, implicit, the sense that he needs to be cleansed, the sense that he needs to be purged, that there is something wrong, that God may leave him.

Verse 11, the Holy Spirit may be removed from him.

So, there is an acknowledging of sin, a recognition of what we are before God. That is the beginning of repentance.

D.L. Moody, after preaching to the prisoners in a Chicago jail, visited them cell by cell. In the first cell he found two men playing cards, and they said, "We are here because false witnesses have testified wrongly against us."

In the second cell the man said that the guilty man had escaped and "I was only an accomplice and I am here."

In the last cell only, Moody found a man crying over his sins, and there it was there he stopped. The recognition of sin intellectually is where repentance begins.

Recognition of sin is the beginning, but it is not the end. It is just the beginning. True repentance involves more than that.

A hardened Pharaoh.

Exodus 9:27, *And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time. The Lord is righteous, and my people and I are wicked.*

A double-minded Balaam.

Numbers 22:34, *And Balaam said to the Angel of the Lord, “I have sinned, for I did not know You stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases You, I will turn back.”*

A remorseful Achan.

Joshua 7:20, *And Achan answered Joshua and said, “Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and this is what I have done:*

An insincere Saul.

1 Samuel 15:24, *Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.*

A desperate, despairing Judas.

Matthew 27:4, *saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” And they said, “What is that to us? You see to it!”*

But in none of those cases does the Bible ever record that true repentance took place, because the intellectual element is only the beginning of it, not the end of it.

2. Emotional.

We go from the mind to the feelings, and it becomes a recognition not only of sin, but that sin is hateful to a holy God, and then there is an overwhelming sense of guilt in the emotions.

Psalm 51:1-2, *Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.*

Here is a man crying for mercy and the only man who needs mercy is a man who is guilty.

Innocent men do not need mercy. Justice will do fine for them. It is guilty men that need mercy, and David recognizes here that he is guilty, and his emotions are stirred.

Psalms 51:10, *Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

Psalms 51:14, *Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.*

He cries out to God in the midst of this sin, in terrible anguish in his heart.

Psalm 32:3-4, *When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. ⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah*

Your tongue dries up when you know you have done something wrong and you are facing the test. David just dried up!

David bones hurt.

He had physiological responses to the emotion of guilt.

We see that repentance involves not only an intellectual element but an emotional sense of guilt, a deep recognition that sin is against the holy God, and an overwhelming sense of sorrow.

All true elements of repentance, all true acts of repentance, must include this feature.

Rich young ruler.

Luke 18:23, *But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.*

He was sorrowful but there is something wrong with that kind of sorrow.

When we talk about emotional pain over sin that the pain is over the violation of a holy God, not over the consequences.

It is got to be a sorrow directed toward God. Sorrow that is merely a sense of shame because everybody found out, or sorrow that is really fear of the consequences, is selfishness.

That is directed towards self not towards God.

True emotional guilt, true sorrow in the heart, is because God has been violated and that is the stuff of which real repentance is made.

There are a lot who are sorry they got caught.

Lot of people who are sorry they lost their reputation.

Lot of people who are sorry they got some consequences.

That is different.

- True repentance does not think of consequences,
- True repentance does not think of other people's opinion,
- True repentance does not think of excuses.

- ✓ True repentance does think of transgressing God,
- ✓ True repentance does think of being personally guilty.
- ✓ True repentance does think about sorrow towards God.

When there is genuine repentance, there will be this deep sense of sorrow directed toward a holy God who has been offended.

Judas, when he betrayed Christ and he was condemned.

Matthew 27:3, *Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*

It was not the right kind.

It was not the repentance that is Godward.
it was the repentance that says, "I don't like the consequences."
That is different.

Repentance begins with the intellect and then it moves to the feelings. But no matter how convinced the mind is about sin, and no matter how pained the emotions become, even in the right way, true repentance will never happen without the third area, and that is volitional/ Will.

3. Volitional

There has got to be an act of the will.
There has got to be a turning around.

David recognized the sin and he felt guilty for it and his guilt was directed toward God, but the thing that really made the repentance happen was the fact that he had an act of will.
He changed his life pattern.

Past:

Psalm 51:5, *Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.*

Psalm 51:7, *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

Turn this depravity around.

Turn this sinfulness around.

Psalm 51:10, *Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

His will wanted a dramatic change.
It is very vital.

The same has been illustrated in the New Testament in many places.

The prodigal son.

First, the prodigal son intellectually knew he had done wrong.

Second, he got very emotional about it, and he began to look at the pig slop that he was eating. He began to realize what a terrible mess he was in.

Third, he was volitional.

Luke 15:18-20, *I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ¹⁹and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." ' ²⁰"And he arose and came to his father.*

There was the act of true repentance consummated. He moved in the direction of God.

Thief on the Cross.

Luke 23:41-42, *And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.*" ⁴² *Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."*

He acknowledges that he was a sinner.

He said to Jesus, "Lord."

Man changed his allegiance.

For a long time either himself, or Satan, or whatever had been lord, but now it was Jesus. "From now on, I want to be identified with You."

There was a change.

His will was activated.

The other thief, it was not so with him.

Notice the difference once repentance occurs, there will be an immediate response.

This is what we find in **Matthew chapter 3**.

V 8, *Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance*

When this really, honest, legitimate, intellectual, emotional, volitional turnaround and transformation occurs under the

power of God as a gift from God, when God does this miracle in a life and there will be fruit.

All true repentance will bear fruit.

John's message then is true repentance.

John is very concerned with validating anybody's supposed repentance on the basis of whether or not they manifest fruit.

If it is not there, then the repentance is not valid.

Because where there is real repentance, there will be real results.

Where there is a transformed life, where there is conversion and transformation.

That is the main message that John uses to confront the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

V 9, *and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*

John the Baptist went further because he knew they would not take it. He knew what they were thinking.

Don't you hate it when somebody reads your mind?

'we have Abraham as our father,'

Stop presuming on your descent from Abraham as a passport to heaven.

This was really a shock to them.

Do you know that these orthodox Jews believed that they were saved by their Jewishness?

The rabbis said, quote, "All Israelites have a portion in the world to come."

They talked about "the delivering merits of the fathers."
They had their own Jewish treasury of merits.

The rabbis taught was that Abraham sat at the gates of Gehenna and hell to turn back any Israelite who happened by chance to come that way.

They said that it was the merits of Abraham which enabled the ships to sail safely on the seas.

Because of the merits of Abraham that the rain descended on the earth.

It was the merits of Abraham which enabled Moses to enter into heaven and receive the law.

It was because of the merits of Abraham that David's prayer was heard, even for the wicked these merits sufficed.

“If your children were mere dead bodies without blood vessels or bones, your merits, Oh Abraham, would avail for them.”

A degenerate person cannot claim salvation on the basis of a heroic past. An evil son cannot plead the merits of a saintly father. They were trying to hold onto their nationality. They were dead wrong.

John 8:39-41, *They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. ⁴⁰ But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. ⁴¹ You do the deeds of your father.” Then they said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God.”*

John 8:52-53, *Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ ⁵³ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?”*

John 8:56-58, *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” ⁵⁷ Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” ⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”*

Who are they?

John 8:44, *You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.*

Genesis 15:6, *And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

John the Baptist message was that all the Jewishness will not save them.

V 9, *and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*

The Pharisees and the Sadducees that confronted John were headed for hell because they were relying for their eternal security on their descent from Abraham. They were Jews, and they were so smug.

For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

What a statement!

It minimizes the importance of being a son of Abraham. But more than that It is a symbolic statement.

If these Jews, by turning their hearts to stone in resisting God's converting grace, then God will take stones - lifeless, useless, dead things - and make them into his sons.

Those stones are symbols of the Gentiles.

Ezekiel 33:25-27, *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. ²⁶I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.*

God said He will remove the stone of heart and put a heart of Flesh.

God will put a new spirit so that we can walk in His statutes.

God says that if you want to turn into rocks, dead, lifeless, and useless, then I will take the dead and lifeless and useless Gentiles and turn them into sons.

Jesus said the same thing. He met a centurion servant who was a Gentile.

Matthew 8:10-12, *When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found*

such great faith, not even in Israel! ¹¹ And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. ¹² But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Jesus said I never met a son like this.

A rock that I can turn into a son.

If God finds a son who has become a rock.

He will find a rock that He can make a son out of.

Conclusion:

Romans 9:6, *But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,*

Galatians 3:7, *Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.*

We have become the children of Abraham.

Galatians 3:29, *And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Galatians 3:13-14, *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), ¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ*

Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Many Christians think they have become children of Abraham and they are eligible for all the blessings are blessed with Abraham here on earth.

So today we here so many preachers in Christendom preaching about the blessings here on earth.

There is a huge difference between before Cross of the Calvary and after.

Let me show the difference in the story Jesus told about the rich man and beggar Lazarus.

Luke 16:22-26, *So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴ "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' ²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those*

who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'

Rich man calls Abraham, 'Father'.

Abraham calls the rich man 'Son'.

The rich man went to hell.

The rich man was a man who had Abraham for his father.

He had Abraham for his father.

He recognized Abraham as a father.

Abraham recognized him as a son racially, but it did not do him any good. No religious attainment does.

Matthew 6:19-21, *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

What are you trusting?

What are you trusting for your salvation?

The Pharisees, they trusted their works, their self-righteousness. They were good. They kept all the religious rules.

The Sadducees, they were just going to make hay while they could right now. They were not worried about the future. It was all here and now.

But together they were smug because they felt that they had inherited the right.

After all, they were the sons of Abraham.

You may have asked Jesus to come to your heart some day but is this day does your life reflect like that?