

No Repentance- No Salvation

John the Baptist was a thundering prophet. In Matthew 11 Jesus said that John the Baptist was the greatest person ever born. Why was John described as the greatest person? It can be argued that Abraham had greater faith. Job had greater endurance. Moses had greater leadership skills. Daniel had greater courage and Joshua greater daring. What marked John the Baptist as the greatest person up to that point in history? The answer is that John had the greatest ministry. He focused upon Jesus. There is no greater ministry than to point people to Jesus.

John's message was very simple, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." John was an old fashioned kind of preacher. He ate honey but he certainly didn't preach it. He preached, "Hell's hot. Heaven is sweet. Sin is black. Judgment is sure and Jesus saves."

The best news is that Jesus died for our sins. Forgiveness, salvation and eternal life are available through Jesus. However, without repentance there is no salvation. Eternal life is not simply intellectual assent. It is not merely head knowledge. Salvation involves turning from sin (repentance) and belief in Jesus.

"Now John was clothed with camel's hair and with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey." The verb tense indicates that he dressed this way on a daily basis. Camel's hair was a long, loose, coarse coat. It was rough material. It represented that he brought a rough message that rubbed people the wrong way. He brought a message of repentance.

John the Baptist preached repentance. Jesus preached repentance. In Luke 13:3 Jesus said, "...unless you repent you will all likewise perish..." Peter preached a message of repentance. On the Day of Pentecost the multitudes asked, "What must we do to be saved?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 2:38). Paul preached a message of repentance. Paul said, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

What is repentance? Repentance impacts the entire personality. Repentance is a deliberate change of the entire person. In Luke 3:4-18 John the Baptist defined repentance. These verses detail five elements of repentance.

The first element is that repentance focuses upon personal sin. Verse 5 says, "Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; and the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth." The valley or ravine represents the base, wicked, evil aspects of a person's life. They must be brought to the surface and confessed. The mountains and hills are the pride, the arrogance, the self-will. There must be humility. The crooked places is the Greek word skolios from which we get skoliosis. It is anything devious or manipulative. The rough ways are anything that stands between a person and God.

True repentance mourns over personal sin. There is brokenness. The crushing of the soul must take place. A person understands that they are measured against the thrice holy God. They have been weighed in the balances of God's holiness and found wanting.

The second element is that repentance always reflects the wrath of God. John asked in verse 7, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" The lesson of history is that God judges sin. If God didn't judge sin He would not be righteous or just. Hell and the lake of fire are a reality. This fact should drive a person to repentance.

The third element is that repentance rejects religious ritual. John was baptizing in the Jordan. John warned them against trusting in the ritual of baptism (verse 8a). Many people today trust in church membership, penance, last rites, the Lord's Supper or other religious rituals. Only repentance and saving faith in Jesus produce salvation.

The fourth element is that repentance always reveals spiritual transformation. If the life does not change there is no repentance. If your life does not change there is no salvation. The multitudes (verse 10) and the tax collectors (verse 12) and the soldiers (verse 14) came to John. They were all told to change their lives.

The fifth element is that repentance recognizes Jesus as the Messiah. In verses 15-17 John focused upon Jesus. Jesus died in our place. John replied, "...One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

I urge you this day to turn away from your empty pursuit of religion and turn to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died in your place bearing your sins. He was buried on the third day and God raised Him from the dead. All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. He will cast away all who are self-righteous. He will cast away all who are self-sufficient. Call upon Him while He is near.

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