

OPENING HEAVEN'S GATES

Mark 1:14-15

The first public message of Jesus was a challenge to repentance. Repentance is the key note to his entire ministry. It tells us here that he made a demand from all of those who would follow him, and be his follower. And Jesus is opening Heaven's Gate. He is pointing the way for men to travel. And this is something that all men are interested in. They are interested in seeking rest. The wording of an epitaph - "at rest at last" - came out of a story concerning a woman whose rather hen-pecked husband had died. After the man was buried, his widow went to the manufacturer of the monuments and selected one that was very imposing and very beautiful. When the salesman got around to making the decision as to the wording that should go on the monument. She suggested the simple words "at rest". On second thought - not being satisfied that this said enough, she had the man to make it read - "at rest - at last". Then the next day she came back and said, I thought about a great deal about the wording on my husband's monument last night. I want to change the inscription. I want you to have it read - "at rest - at last - til we meet again".

By implication at least, we are made to wonder what did happen when they met.

Some preachers and a lot of Christians I know, spend their time talking about how they look forward to that land of rest. Going through the gates of Heaven. Such people can easily become pessimistic concerning the future glory. For instance, here is this old man who is always complaining about how hard he works. How he never did get any rest. One day his pastor was trying to cheer him up a bit, and pointing out that his journey would soon be over. His labors

would soon be ended, and he would be at rest with the Lord. The old brother responded with, yes, I know. But with the luck I have always had, the resurrection morning is bound to come the (day after I die)

Now we do not want to be frustrated about the gates to Heaven. Jesus came preaching into Galilee, and my what a preacher he was. He was proclaiming, speaking, talking, and he was sure of his message.

For one thing he preached with authority. All authority given me in Heaven and in earth. He was sure what he preached. He was not concerned about the criticism of man. It wasn't a dull, dry message - but it was a thrilling one.

Some years ago some minister suggested that there ought to be a moratorium on preaching. Now this is not Jesus. Jesus teaches us in the parable of the soils that nothing will ever take the place of preaching.

We learn from example that Jesus taught us that the best method of promoting the kingdom of God was by preaching. Jesus said the time is fulfilled. The time of all ages has come - the kingdom of God is at hand. He said, seek ye first the kingdom of God.

Now this was good news. It was extra news. The news of the reign and the rule of God, in the hearts of men. It told about God's love. The kingdom of God did not mean meat and drink and righteousness, peace, joy, in the Holy Ghost. Rom. 14:17. He came preaching the kingdom of God.

Jesus said two worlds were in conflict - the world of evil and the world of God. And he wants men to break out of this world of evil and he wants something to happen to man. And he wants the greatest miracle to come and take place and

to leave man out of this.

I. OPENING THE GATES

Jesus gave a key for opening the gates. Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.

Nathan preached to David this message long ago.

John the Baptist preached this in the wilderness of Judea - he preached it to the king that sat upon the throne. Herod had violated the 7th commandment. And John was beheaded because he preached on repentance.

Now Jesus followed John the Baptist. And he preached the same message. But the kingdom of God would be opened to men if they would repent and have faith. They liked two spokes in a wheel, two hinges on a door. You must walk by faith and not by sight. But there must be faith and repentance.

And what did Jesus mean when he said repent. Literally, "to change your mind. The story of the boy in the (geometry) class who had made a mess of the problem that he was supposed to work. The teacher said, my boy, you must think. I did think, the lad replied. And the instructor said well, think again, and think differently. Now this is what repentance is. I must think again and I must think differently.

Repentance is a beautiful word. It has been misunderstood and it has been many times substituted for. There are some who think they have repented but they have not.

The word means "to change your mind to be sorry enough for your sins - that you will be willing to quit them. Paul pointed up in 2 Cor. 7:10 - that Godly

sorrow worketh repentance to salvation. But he says the sorrow of the world worketh death. So there are two kinds of [sorrow] - a Godly sorrow and a worldly sorrow. A worldly sorrow is artificial. It touches only the surface. It rises no higher than man himself. He is sorry because he is afraid his sin will find him out. He is sorry because he will be punished for his sins. He is sorry because his conscience hurts him and he says - I wish I had not done that. I have been foolish. But the next time around that he is tempted, he soon yields and he feels less and less sorry and he goes on. Sin becomes easier and easier. And his conscience becomes duller and duller.

When men go to prison, they say, I am sorry I was caught.

Real repentance is in knowing pain - and feeling a sense of guilt. It is the most miserable of all feelings. It makes a man hate himself. Feel at war with himself. And with God. Repentance makes a man say I am bad, I hate myself. And God hates me.

Now, Judas is a real example of worldly sorrow. His sorrow did not save him but it drove him to despair. He committed suicide. That was no real repentance.

Now Godly sorrow is illustrated in the life of Peter. He wept bitterly and was restored.

There are many substitutes for repentance.

First, emotionalism - somebody gets afraid of hell-fire preaching. He gets stirred up. The tears may come. But in a few days that emotionalism wears off. And you can't find it, in God's kingdom.

Or being worried or troubled. We ought to weep over our sins. We ought to be afraid because of them.

Sometimes we substitute sick bed repentance for true repentance. Here is a person who thinks he is going to die. He asks God to get him well. And he promises, Lord, if you will get me well, I am going to do something great for you. Then when he does get well - he forgets the promises he has made. He is as pious as a pope when he is sick. But he is as mean as a demon when he is well.

Now I am not saying that real repentance does not come through sick beds or illness. Sometimes when trouble comes like that, many people have a change of mind.

Now there are those who may substitute sacrifice. Now the Jews were good at this. They thought God required burnt offerings and sacrifices. And if they brought a bullock and put him on God's altar, they would be forgiven. What God requires is a contrite and a broken heart. He requires righteousness. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. Seek judgement. Relieve the oppressed. Judge the fatherless. Plead for the widows. Though your sins be as scarlet - they shall be as white as snow. ^{1/} Isa. 1:13-18.

Ezekiel 18:27- When the wicked man turns away from his wickedness, that he hath committed and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul. ^{2/}

Therefore, our sacrifices are even the punishment that we may endure or inflict upon ourselves is a poor substitute. There are people who go into a monastery - deny the world and live a life that is apart. And they give up all the things that are pleasant in life in order that they might atone and it might make them good and pious men and women. But they are miserable. And it

helps no more to do this than it does to offer burnt offerings. The conscience is not relieved. And they are not comforted. Though they may torture themselves.

Godly sorrow is after the mind of God. It looks upon sin as God does. It hates sin. We who really repent must see sin through the eyes of God.

David said, against thee, thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight. Psalm 51:4.

Peter though he denied Christ, repented of his sin - and became a preacher. A great rock. And tradition tells us that he was crucified with his head downward for Christ.

The sob of anguish - who is me for I am undone is seldom heard today. Instead sometimes young people and adults will come into the church and will profess to be Christians. With some kind of giggle on their faces and have not been moved in their hearts for change. Repentance is indispensible to salvation. Luke 13:3. And the Bible declares that repentance is the first step in the soul's return to God. This opens Heaven's gates. Now men have tried to persuade themselves that something else or something less can pass for repentance. Jer. 25:5, Eze. 14:6, Joel 2:13.

The word repent in it's various forms occurs many times in the New Testament. Under the thought of contrition.

There are two words here translated repent. The one means to sigh or groan. Then to lament or groan. This word appears about 40 times and refers to God.

Now the other word means to turn or to return. It is given as repent. Turn away. Turn. Return. And similar terms nearly 600 times in the New Testament.

61 times with the meaning of thinking differently - that is to change one's mind. There are two of these words in the New Testament translated repent. The one means to care afterwards - a sorrow or remorseful regret. It may lead to a turning. It is more than merely regret.

The other word is stronger. And it occurs 57 times. It means to change ones mind for the better. To have another mind.

As the word for mind mind includes the feelings, judgements, desires, purposes. The reversal of man's nature. It is to turn right about face as someone has described it in Psalm 119:59-60. I thought on my ways. That means halt. I turned my feet unto thy testimonies. That means right about turn. I made haste and delayed not to keep thy commandments. That means quick march. Repentance applied to man means to go the opposite way and to do the opposite thing.

There are really three Greek words for repentance.

1. The first one means to change one's mind. Always for the better and morally. Which changes one's life and brings a mighty change in the heart as well as in the life. It is not just merely a forsaking of sin. But it is to recover one's senses. To come to one's self as the prodigal son.

John the Baptist preached to the Jews that this change of mind was necessary to receive the Messiah. And Jesus preached that this same change of mind was necessary to accept the Messiah and to open the gates of Heaven.

2 The second Greek word implies regret. To have after care. That is to be troubled by the consequences of sin. Rather than just the deep regret. At the

cause for want of knowing better.

3 The third word signifies a (real change of mind) and attitude toward sins itself. And this appears 24 times. And it is toward God. And of course this is the kind of repentance that (brings) comfort. When a sinner repents, turns to God through Christ, he is sure to be comforted by the touch of divine hands.

Therefore, (good notions) are not repentance. (Herod) had some good thoughts when he listened to John. Solemn vows and resolutions are likewise poor substitutes. And are quickly forgotten.

The (leaving) off of sins - the exchanging of one sin for another sin, if a bone is broken and sets wrong - the surgeon must break it again and set it right.

Therefore, the matter of opening Heaven's gate is an ingredient of repentance. When humility takes place and breaks in upon the heart. And (a man) sees the infraction of his sins against God's will. And he comes to the place of contrition and confession. Which in turn will lead to conversion.

II. / CLOSING THE GATE /

Now I come to say the (saddest) part of this sermon. (What) about those who refuse to repent.

Now that is an important word that Jesus gave in Luke 13:2 - concerning the Galileans that Pilate had slaughtered. The people asked Jesus if this happened

because of their sins. He said I tell you nay but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. He meant this, that the bloody slaughter would be repeated and that sinners would suffer in a similar way and perish unless they repent.

It is repent or perish. Repent or suffer. Repent or be punished.

Jesus knew that preaching was a tremendous responsibility. That every minister must give an account unto God. And God forbid that I say that people that sin will not be punished.

I do not want anyone to stand in the day of judgement and say to me, you flattered me. You did not tell me the whole truth. The solemn thing about eternity. The doom of sinners. You seem to be afraid to preach the whole truth. What a terrible indictment this would be.

Unless you repent, you who are living in sin, will likewise perish unless you change your way of life. You will die in your sins and go to an eternity without God. God has done all in his power to bring you to repentance. The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. Rom. 2:4. He has left nothing undone. Christ died upon the cross and if you go to your grave without Christ, you must go by way of the cross. If you refuse, you are disobedient, then God will not change the direction.

There is no man living that believes more in the goodness, the mercy, the love of God than I do - and the long suffering. I say to you that I also believe that God is the God of judgement. A God of justice. He will not tolerate sin. God hates sin. And that is why Jesus died. And there could be nothing worse than for a person to die without Jesus Christ and go to a literal fire.

Ernest Baxter used to say, sinners turn or burn. That was the choice that a

man had. Turn or burn.

Now I am not saying that to frighten you. You can't frighten people into the kingdom of God. But I believe you need to know that there is judgement and men are really not frightened into goodness. But you need to know - be sure your sin will find you out. Whatsoever a man soweth - that shall he also reap.

The truth of the matter is, that God cannot and will not allow sin to go unpunished. Now I cannot imagine God rewarding the wicked. And the righteous equally in the same way. If Christ took the punishment upon himself and he bear our stripes, then if we disobey God, we will bear the consequences.

It stands to reason, if you do not repent, you cannot be forgiven. You will not open the gates of Heaven. To forgive one who is a sinner - who will not repent, would be just to confirm him in his way and to teach him to go on and do evil. You love sin, you are going from bad to worse - so you just go on.

As long as God lives, there can be no promise of mercy for those who continue in their evil ways. And refuse to acknowledge their wrong doing. No rebel can accept pardon for treason. The judge of the earth will not put his sin away if we refuse to put them away ourselves.

If we think there is no punishment for sin - then read the Bible. The wages of sin is death. Did the sin of Adam and Eve go unpunished. What about Cain's sin. Noah's sin. Jonah's sin. Jacob's sin. David's sin. Sampson, Judas, the whole Bible condemns sin. And those who continue to live in sin are condemned. Dr. R. G. Lee says there will be payday some day.

If God does not condemn sin, then we had better re-write all the verses in the Bible. That God spared now the angels that sinned, but he cast them down into Hell and delivered them unto the change of darkness - to be reserved unto judgement. And spared not the old world. 2 Peter 2:4-5.

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Matt. 7:23 - Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me ye that work iniquity.

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Matt. 25:46 - These shall go away unto ever lasting punishment. But the righteous unto life eternal.

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Matt. 13:41-42 - The son of man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend. And them which do iniquity - and shall cast them into a furnace of fire. And there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

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Matt. 25:41 - Then shall he say also unto them, on his left hand - depart from me ye cursed unto everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.

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Matt. 23:33 - Ye serpents, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell.

What is the meaning of all of this. We cannot argue of these words because they are the words of the Lord Jesus. Now you were wrong if you say sin is not punished. Christ demands real repentance. He demands the kind of repentance that changes life. And changes a man's mind. When Zacchaeus said behold Lord, I've give half of my goods to the poor. And if I have taken anything from any man falsely, I will restore it fourfold. Real repentance takes care of a man's outward conduct. And he leaves off those sins that he has committed. But one leak can sink a ship. And one sin can sink a soul. You cannot hold on to our sins.

Repentance must be immediate. You say I am going to postpone. I am going to delay - put it off. Wait until I grow older. Wait until I reach my deathbed. Now if you say this, you are deceiving yourself. Few people ever change after a long life of sin. Death comes unaware. And men drop dead on the streets. You cannot afford to come to the deathbed without Christ.

The Jewish Rabbi said, let every man repent one day before he dies. And since he may die tomorrow, let him take heed to turn from his evil ways today. Now is the time for repentance. Repentance is not just the sweeping away of a little dust one day. Or the cutting down of a few weeds and leaving the roots. Because they will grow forever and the place will continue to collect dust. But it is something that we must continue in our lives. And Heaven's gates are open, by our repentance. Through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1881, the College of William and Mary was closed for 7 years. The Civil War was on and the college was in ruins. The reconstruction days were on and they were over powered by financial needs. During those 7 barren years, the President rang the chapel bell. There were no students. The faculty had disappeared. The rain was sweeping through the leaky roofs. But every morning President Ever still rang the bell. It was an act of faith.

The day came when the doors were open. And once again it became an outstanding educational institution in the nation.

That's the way out of any failure. To keep tugging at the bell rope. Even though it looks dark. And this is the challenge that Jesus brings. When there is a tug at your conscience - he keeps pleading and says repent ye. There is something that comes to your guilty soul. There is something that comes to your inner life. There is something externally that influences you. There

is the word of some person that confronts you. There is the knowledge of some book - you have seen some sentence printed. There is some Scripture text that has grasp your conscience. It is like the tugging of the bell rope. And it is calling you to repentance. And to repent. As the bell rope continued to be pulled - finally the doors to the college were opened. Now if you will allow this pull for repentance to take place in your heart and in your life, Heaven's gates will be opened. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the Gospel.