

Through Repentance to Faith - Part 1

by Derek Prince

Repentance is the essential foundation of true faith, as it involves a change of mind and will, turning away from dead works and towards God.

Duration: 27:05

Scripture: Luke 15:17

Topics: "Repentance And Faith", "Christian Conversion"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the foundational importance of repentance before faith in the Christian journey. It delves into the doctrinal foundation outlined in Hebrews 6:1-3, highlighting the six foundational doctrines including repentance from dead works and faith toward God. The sermon stresses the significance of true repentance, distinguishing it from mere emotion and emphasizing the need for a decision of the will to turn towards God. It warns against false repentance and the consequences of despising God's grace, using the example of Esau. The message concludes with the essential nature of repentance preceding genuine faith, as seen in the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus.

Transcript

Now we're going to turn to the third session of laying the foundation and the title of this message is through repentance to faith. And I want to say right at the beginning there is no other way to faith except through repentance. Any other way that claims to get you there is a deception.

True faith is impossible without repentance. Now I want to go on today by discussing the doctrinal foundation. We've looked at the personal foundation which is Jesus Christ.

But the New Testament also reveals that there is a doctrinal foundation. This is a revelation which has escaped the notice of millions of Christians. But it is very clearly stated Hebrews chapter 6 verses 1 through 3. We'll turn there now.

Hebrews 6 1 through 3 which says, Therefore leaving the discussion of the elementary principles or the basic truths of Christ, let us go on to perfection, completion, or maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. Now there are two thoughts there which you have to combine.

First of all it's essential to lay the foundation. If you've never laid the foundation you can never do the building. But once you have really laid the foundation, then don't keep relaying the foundation, but go on to a complete building.

Those are the two combined thoughts. But you'll see in Hebrews 6 verse 1 it says the foundation. This is the doctrinal foundation of the Christian faith.

And it lists six doctrines which I will go through again. Number one repentance from dead works. Number two, faith toward God.

Number three, the doctrine of baptisms plural. Number four, the laying on of hands. Number five, resurrection of the dead.

And number six, eternal judgment. And if you follow that through, you'll see it takes us from the very starting point of the Christian faith, to its ultimate fulfillment in eternity. And it's very important to see that the Christian faith does not terminate in time.

It does not terminate in this life, or this world. It takes us beyond this world, beyond time, into eternity. And I fear that many, many Christians today hardly have any vision of eternity.

They act and think as if everything that matters is going to happen in time. And actually Paul said, if we only in this life have faith in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable, the most to be pitied. If you do not have a vision that takes you beyond time and into eternity, your condition is pitiable.

And you will suffer very many disappointments. Because time is not the fulfillment. The fulfillment comes in eternity.

And so these six doctrines take us from the starting point, which is repentance, right through to resurrection and judgment. Now I want to begin to speak about the first foundation doctrine. That is repentance from dead works.

But I want to point out to you something. First of all, a very remarkable thing. In verse 3 of Hebrews 6, the writer says, this we will do if God permits.

We will go on to completion and fulfillment if God permits. Now you might ask, well why would God not permit? Surely he wants us all to go on. I'll answer you from a little simple example from building.

In any major city of the civilized world today, in order to build a building, you have to have a plan. You have to get a permit from the authorities. And they have to approve your plan.

And then they will come and inspect your building, stage by stage, as you go through with it. And the first thing they'll really inspect, is the foundation. Because they know that if the foundation is not secure, the building will not be secure.

And if your foundation isn't solid, they will not issue a permit to continue the building. And God deals with you and me exactly the same way. He says I need to inspect your foundation.

And if it isn't laid according to my requirements, I'm not going to give you a permit to go on. You can just go on forever, in this elementary stage of the Christian faith. Never maturing, never coming to completion, never coming to fulfillment.

Because you haven't laid the right foundation. So you see how absolutely essential it is, that we master these six doctrines which are the foundation of the Christian faith. And we're going to look now at the first one.

Repentance from dead works. First of all what are dead works? Most of the modern translations say, works or deeds which lead to death. I don't believe that's correct.

I believe dead works are anything we do, when it's not done in faith to God. Anything not done in faith, is a dead work. The only thing that brings life into our activity, is faith.

So you may have been a very good church goer. You may have given money to the poor. You may have said prayers.

But if it wasn't done in faith, it was all dead works. We have to turn away from everything not done in faith. Faith alone gives life to what we believe and what we do.

That doesn't mean that you've necessarily been leading a sinful life. But you just haven't been alive to God. Because faith hasn't come into your heart and brought the life of God.

Now it's very important that we understand what repentance is. Repentance is not an emotion. I've seen many times preachers will seek to work people up into an emotional attitude and then call them to faith in Christ.

And very, very often that leads to a letdown. Because they, the emotion runs out and they're left with nothing. So bear in mind, repentance as defined in the Bible, is not an emotion.

It is a decision. It doesn't spring from the emotions. It springs from the will.

If we can reach people's will and turn their will, we will see permanent conversions. Many of the so-called conversions in the church today are impermanent. Because they have never really changed the will of the person.

They've had an emotional experience. They've got excited. Maybe they've felt wonderful for a few weeks or months or even years.

But in the end they don't have what it takes to go through. Because their will has not been touched. Now you know there are two main languages of the Bible.

Greek of the New Testament and Hebrew of the Old. And each of those languages has a specific word for repent. But only if we put the two languages together do we get the full meaning of repentance.

The Greek word in secular language is always translated to change your mind. To change the way you think. So first of all, repentance is changing your mind about the way you've been living.

I've been living to please myself, to do my own thing. From now on I'm going to live to please Jesus my Savior. It's a decision.

As I've said before, it is not an emotion. You can repent without any obvious emotion. But you cannot repent without a change of your will.

And then the Hebrew word, and this is so typical of the Jewish people. Because they're a very down-to-earth people. They want to know, well what does it work out at.

And the Hebrew word for repent means literally to turn around. You've been facing one way, the wrong way, with your back to God. You turn 180 degrees, face toward God and say God here I am, tell me what to do and I'll do it.

So you put the two together and you have a complete picture of repentance. And faith comes only after repentance. The whole message of the Bible is in this order, repent and believe.

There are lots of people and some of them are here this morning, who are struggling for faith. The truth is you're not struggling for faith, you've never met the condition of repentance. You see it's the first of the six foundation doctrines.

And if you don't have that foundation stone in place, your building will always be wobbly. I have counseled over the years, hundreds of people, hundreds of Christians, who've come with their personal problems. And after a lot of experience, I came to this conclusion.

At least 50% of the problems of professing Christians, or real Christians, are due to one fact. They have never truly repented. They have never really changed their mind.

They've never really made a decision. They've never really surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus in their lives. They're still thinking about decisions from this point of view.

Now if I do this, what will it do for me? And if I do that, what will it do for me? When you've repented, that's not the way you think. You think if I do this, will it glorify Jesus? If I do that, will it glorify Jesus? And so we have multitudes of people. I think especially young people, but not only young people, who are double-minded.

And the Bible says a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. He doesn't have a solid foundation. He doesn't, he can't produce a stable building.

So I invite you, just where you are right now, quietly to reflect for a few moments. And ask yourself, have I ever really, truly repented? Or am I still double-minded? On Monday my aim is to please Jesus. On Tuesday my aim is to please myself.

You see you've got the worst of both worlds actually. You'd be better off just living in the world, living for yourself. Because you're a double-minded person, you're a split personality.

Now we have to go on with the nature of repentance. There is one parable that Jesus told, which is the most vivid and perfect illustration of true repentance. It's the parable of what we call the prodigal son.

Though somebody else has said it should be called the caring father. You remember the story in Luke 15. Most of you know it.

The second son of a wealthy family decided to get all his inheritance from his father right now. Then went off to a distant, distant country and lived it up. He did, he spent, he did all sorts of sinful things.

And then when he'd spent his whole inheritance, a famine came. And the only job he could get was feeding pigs. And you have to remember he was Jewish.

So for him to feed pigs was just as low as he could come. Without any slight on pig farmers. We're not saying anything against them.

But it just so happens that for the Jewish people the pig is right outside. And so here he is in rags, feeding the pigs, hungry. Wishing he could fill his stomach with the husks that the pigs are eating.

And then this is what happens. Verse 17 of Luke 15. When he came to himself he said.

Now that's the point you have to come to. You have to come to yourself. What I call the moment of truth.

You have to see yourself as you really are. You have to see yourself as God sees you. When he came to himself he said.

How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare. And I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father and will say to him.

Father I've sinned against heaven and before you. And I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants.

Now you see the two elements. Because it goes on to say. And he arose and came to his father.

He made a decision and he turned around. That's repentance. Making a decision and carrying your decision out.

Going back to the father whom you have offended. To the God who loves you. Saying I made a mess of my life.

I can't run my own life. I need you. Will you take me back.

The wonderful thing is he planned to say to the father. Make me as one of your hired servants. But when he started out.

His father was watching for him. I think this is so beautiful. That's how God is.

When we begin to turn. He's watching for us and waiting for us. The father saw him a long way off.

And ran to meet him. That's how God is. That's how he meets us.

And he kissed him. And he never let him say those last words. Make me as one of your hired servants.

He said bring out the best robe. Put a ring on his finger. Sandals on his feet.

And kill the fatted calf. That's the result of true repentance. It's worth repenting to be welcomed like that by God.

That's the picture. Just think about it for a moment yourself. He came to himself.

He said I made a mess of my life. I've wasted everything my father gave me. But I'm going to make a decision.

I'm going to turn around. I'm going to go back to my father and say I'm sorry. And he turned and went.

Think about that. That is true repentance. Repentance in action.

Now there can be a false repentance. Which we in English today call remorse. Judas experienced that.

Described in Matthew 27 verse 3 and following. Then Judas the betrayer of Jesus, seeing that he had been condemned was remorseful. And brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.

Saying I have sinned by betraying innocent blood. And they said what is that to us? You see to it. Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple.

And departed and went and hanged himself. Judas had remorse. But he never changed.

In fact I believe he'd passed the point where he could change. And to me this is a solemn thought. People can in this life pass the point where it's possible for them to change.

I think the most significant moment in any human life is the moment when God begins to deal with you about repenting. And if you shrug your shoulders and say well I'm not interested. Maybe later.

There's no guarantee that God will ever deal with you again. The most, the most critical moment in any human life is the moment when God says repent. I'm willing to take you back.

I love you. I want you. I've considered what I've seen in people's lives and in the Bible.

And I've come to the conclusion that there's one thing that makes God really angry. And it is despising his grace. He freely offers us his grace.

But if we despise it he turns in anger. There's one person who despised the grace of God. You know what his name was? Esau.

And he's described in Hebrews chapter 12. I want to look at that passage for a moment. Because there's a lot of the Esau in people like you and me.

We want to be careful that Esau doesn't make our decisions. This is what it says in Hebrews 12 beginning at verse 14. Pursue peace with all men and holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Notice that without holiness no one will see the Lord. Looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God. Lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble and by this many become defiled.

Lest there be any fornicator or profane or godless person like Esau. Who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. Now we have no record whatever that Esau ever committed fornication.

But his attitude to God, in God's eyes, was just as bad as fornication. What was his attitude? For one little bowl of soup he despised his birthright. He had the birthright as the elder son.

All the inheritance could have gone to him. But just because he was physically hungry and could smell that delicious soup which Jacob had prepared. This is very vivid to me because I lived amongst the Arabs for some time.

And they make exactly what Jacob made, soup of lentils. They call it in Arabic shuribat adas. And it has the most delicious smell.

It permeates the house. And I can picture Esau coming back from his hunting, tired, hungry. And he just smells this delicious smell.

And Jacob says, bargainer that he was, listen you sell me your birthright, I'll give you the pottage, the soup. And I suppose he thought, well what good will my birthright do to me now I'm hungry. I'll just take what I've got offered to me.

And it says Esau despised his birthright. And he made God extremely angry. And later on through the prophet Malachi, God said, Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated.

That's a very solemn thought. If you deliberately despise the grace of God and the inheritance which he offers you in Jesus Christ. Turn away for some cheap temporary pleasure of this world.

You make God very angry. And then it says, going on with that story. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected.

Rejected by God. For he found no place of repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. Now the Greek makes it clear, he wasn't seeking the place of repentance, he was seeking the blessing.

But he was rejected because he found no place, no way to repent. And I do believe that in this life, a person can pass the place of repentance and never be able to get back. I want to urge upon you, this is a very, very solemn thought.

Far too little is said today in many congregations, in many denominations, about the need for repentance. But without true repentance, there can never be true faith. You will always have a wobbly up and down experience.

In one day and out the next. Because you haven't laid the first foundation stone which is repentance. A decision of the will to turn away from self-pleasing and doing your own thing.

To turn back to God, to face up to God and say God here I am, tell me what to do and I'll do it. That's repentance. There are some of you here today who have never truly repented.

And I want to suggest to you, it's the source of many of your problems. Your up and down experiences. You feel good one day, you have a wonderful meeting in the church, you think it's wonderful.

But next morning something else happens and you're down. You've never really laid the first foundation stone. All you have is a wobbly edifice, which one day will collapse.

Now I want to emphasize that repentance must go before faith. There is no true faith without repentance. And this is emphasized all through the New Testament.

In Matthew chapter three we read about the ministry of John the Baptist, who was sent to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus. And what was his message? In one word, repent. In other words, repentance was essential before the Messiah could come.

Repentance prepared the way for the coming of Messiah. Until God's people, Israel, had been through this experience of repentance, they could not be ready to meet their Messiah. In Matthew three, verses one through three, it says in those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah saying the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. How did he prepare the way of the Lord? By calling God's people back to repentance. And repentance is the only way we can prepare for the Lord to come into our hearts and lives.

And then when John had finished his course, Jesus himself in fulfillment of John's prophetic word came to continue the ministry of the gospel. And it says in Mark 1 14 and 15. Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel and saying the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.

Repent and believe the gospel. Repent and believe. You cannot truly believe unless you have first repented.

The first word of command that ever came from the lips of Jesus was not believe but repent.

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