

Repentance

by Major Ian Thomas

The sermon emphasizes the importance of repentance and evaluation in the Christian church, highlighting the dangers of ignorance, conceit, and a lack of faith, love, and hope.

Duration: 56:26

Scripture: Revelation 2:4

Topics: "Dependence On God", "Repentance"

Description

Major Ian Thomas emphasizes the critical need for repentance within the church, using the example of the church in Ephesus, which, despite its busy programs and doctrinal soundness, had forsaken its first love for Christ. He warns that spiritual inefficiency often stems from ignorance or conceit, and that a church can become so focused on its activities that it forgets the necessity of Christ's presence and guidance. Thomas calls for a return to genuine repentance, recognizing our utter dependence on God, and the importance of allowing God to work through us rather than relying solely on our efforts. He highlights that true faith is demonstrated not by our busyness for God, but by allowing God to act on our behalf, which is rooted in a posture of continuous repentance.

Transcript

Some years ago, I was in Tyler, Texas, which is reputed to be the rose garden of the world. Most cities in the United States are something of the world, bigger than most things anywhere else. But this was an institute which I enjoyed very much, with about a thousand young folks, mostly married couples, who'd been converted over the previous year or two, mainly through home Bible study groups.

And one of the men with whom it was my joy to share this particular institute was a man called Fred Smith, a very fine Christian businessman, who is president of a business analysis firm in the United States. They move into some of the largest industrial empires and make an evaluation. And he had one or two quite interesting things to say.

He said, when we move into such an industrial concern, big or small, we discover that where there is inefficiency, it's almost always the result of one of two things. First, ignorance, or two, conceit. And that was quite interesting.

He said, where it's ignorance, we relax, because we can do something about it, because we can teach the folk and put things right. But where it's conceit, we write it off immediately as a total loss, because we

know the situation is absolutely hopeless, because there's nothing we can teach them. And you know, by and large, the immense amount of inefficiency, spiritually, in the Christian church, as he pointed out then, derives from one or other of those two sources, ignorance or conceit.

Where it's ignorance, the situation can be remedied, because they can be taught. But where it's conceit, nothing can be done. It's beyond repair.

But it's good on occasions to take stock, and as those engaged in Christian ministry, as all of us are, just to pause and evaluate. The question arises, of course, to whom shall we turn to make the evaluation? And of course, obviously, there's only one answer. There's only one person who is qualified to exercise any jurisdiction, whatever, in this particular regard.

The Lord Jesus himself. So I thought for these few moments, we might turn to the book of the Revelation, which in spite of the title given to the book in the Bible, the Revelation of Saint John the Divine, is in point of fact, as indicated clearly in the first verse, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass, and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John, who bear record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. So this is the revelation or testimony of the Lord Jesus.

The role that John was given the privilege of playing was to record it for your edification and mine. Then in the second chapter, having been introduced in the first chapter to the one whose revelation, whose testimony it is, the one in other words who's speaking, Christ himself, to the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, which is clearly indicated for us in the preceding chapter, are those to whom has been given the privilege of ministering Christ, those who proclaim the word the stars, whether from the pulpit of course, or in private conversation, whether it's the man who with the Bible in his hand is giving an exposition to a people, or whether it's mother on her knees with a child by her side. These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, and who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, or better translated lampstands.

Who's the one who walks in the midst of the sevenfold golden lampstand? A picture, beautiful picture that we have both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Lord Jesus, in all the glorious centrality of Christ within his witnessing church, the church is the sevenfold golden lampstand, whose office it is to bear the light that doesn't have its source in the lampstand, but has its source of course in the oil that flows through it. As it's your privilege and mine to bear the light that doesn't have its origin in us, but must of it to be legitimate derived from the one through whose presence we share the life of our risen Lord, the Holy Spirit.

But we know at least with whom now we are confronted in this particular evaluation. And in the second verse of this second chapter of the book of the Revelation, we have two very frightening words. Chapter 2 and verse 2. I know.

I know. He doesn't say I think. He doesn't say I suppose.

He doesn't say I've heard. He doesn't say I dare or I imagine. He says I know.

I haven't been told this by anybody. This isn't hearsay. It isn't second hand.

I know. And he's the one with whom we have to do. He's the one who at this very moment is in our midst as those who represent part of his body, the witnessing church of God on earth.

Well, how do you go on? What do you say about these folks to whom he now addresses himself? It's the church in Ephesus. He says I know thy labor and thy patience and how thou canst not bear them which are evil. How thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not and hast found them liars.

I know that thou hast borne and hast patience and for my name's sake labored and hast not fainted. He says I know. I've been there in the midst of all your activities.

I've been there. I've attended all your committee meetings. I've been there.

I've been present in all those occasions where you've mobilized your resources and promoted your projects. I've been there. I've been in all your services and all your conventions.

I've been in all your prayer meetings. I know. What was the first thing he says he knew about this particular church in Ephesus? Well, he said I know thy works and thy labor.

He said I know that you're a church that is characterized by a heavy program of evangelistic and missionary activity. I've been in the church vestibule and I've seen the group photographs of your missionary families whom you support. I know your eager concern to see the gospel spread to the outermost ends of the earth.

I know your camping program in the summer. I know the number of your young men and women who are right now in training for various areas of Christian activity. He said I know.

I know your Sunday school program and I know that you're a busy, busy, busy church and it's incumbent upon every single individual member who makes a profession of faith to be deeply involved and get on the bandwagon. I know. I've watched you.

You have open air meetings. You organize evangelistic crusades. You do door-to-door evangelism.

You have liturgy distribution. I know. What was the second thing he said about the church in Ephesus? He said I know that thou canst not bear them which are evil.

Not only are you heavily engaged in an evangelistic outreach missionary minded endeavor. The days of the week packed with various meetings of the different organizations but not only that. You're a church that sustains not only a heavy program but one which has strong convictions about right and wrong.

You're an other worldly church. In matters of social concern in what today is a permissive society you stand out and bear your testimony loud and clear for what is right as opposed to what is wrong. There's nothing gray about the position you adopt.

You maintain a deep, strong moral integrity. I know it. There's no compromise allowed.

So that's the second thing the Lord Jesus said he knew about this church. What was the third thing? He said thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not. And hast found them liars.

In other words you not only sustain a heavy evangelistic and missionary program. Not only are you solidly based on deep spiritual convictions about what is right and about what is wrong. Booking of no possible

compromise with evil.

But you're a church that is fundamentally bible believing, conservatively evangelical to the vintages. And where anybody comes and claiming ecclesiastical authority propagates doctrines that are not in conformity with the claims of God's word you can at once expose them for the heretics they are and prove them lies. Doctrinally you're absolutely sound.

Now this is what the Lord Jesus said about the church in Ephesus. A busy church that brooked of no moral compromise and that was solidly biblically evangelical. Supposing you were moving into that area for the first time.

You had a wife and children. Maybe where you in business your firm has transferred your assignment. Or you might be an immigrant coming from overseas and you're Christian.

And you're looking for a church where you can get involved. You're looking for a church where you can send your kids off to camp under their leadership or engage in their recreational activity without any suggestion in your heart or mind or fear that they will be exposed to anything that would be doubtful. And furthermore you want to be able to send your kids to Sunday school and know that no matter what class they're in every single Sunday school teacher will teach the word of God without compromise and without apology.

And you'll know that every morning as you sit in church morning and evening from the pulpit you'll hear nothing but the unadulterated unapologetic word of God. How about this church? Don't you think this would be just the thing? Well on the surface yes. And yet it was a church that had sunk so low.

Had fallen to such depths. Was in such dire desperate need of repentance that it was just about to be disowned by Jesus Christ. Said the Lord Jesus nevertheless by my evaluation I have somewhat against thee.

Thou hast left thy first love. You have forsaken literally me. Me.

Your doctrines are right. Doctrine of justification by faith. You're absolutely tops eschatologically.

You believe and proclaim my second coming. Nobody is allowed to claim church membership apart from a genuine spiritual regeneration to which they will bear testimony. Everything is wrapped up.

The one person now amidst all your activity who has ceased to be relevant and ceased to be necessary is myself. You've forsaken me. You've got the organization so beautifully teed up that everything Sunday by Sunday rolls.

With all the wheels carefully greased. The only thing about you the Lord Jesus might have added is this. That if God were to die and be buried tonight your church would still be in operation next week.

You've forsaken me. You've learned how to be bible believing conservatively evangelistic missionary minded people without me. That was the church in Ephesus.

I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou'rt fallen and repent and do the first works. Get back in other words to where you belong.

Learn again what are the first principles of the oracles of God. Get back to first base or else ultimatum. I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candle stick out of his place except thou repent.

So what would you say about this church? It would be very very very difficult to discern wouldn't it as a casual visitor just passing by just there for the weekend or a week or two. It would be very very difficult to discern that this was a church in such desperate need of repentance that had fallen to such tragic debt that Jesus Christ was just about to disown it, remove its candle stick. It would be very very difficult to discern that this was the kind of church to which the Lord Jesus would have to address such an ultimatum.

It was a church that had stopped repenting and there's nothing easier for you or me to do as those engaged in Christian work than stop repenting. Especially where God gives us any measure of success. When the numbers are rolling in and you've got lots of people to help and the budget is being well maintained and you've got lots of people going out in all directions and your institution is a hive of activity that's precisely where we stop repenting.

And the moment you and I stop repenting then we deny the very gospel that we profess to proclaim and we become as offensive to Jesus Christ as Peter when he said not so Lord that can't happen to you. We've decided otherwise. What are the characteristics of a church that has stopped repenting? And bear in mind that a church that has stopped repenting won't stop holding services, won't stop being evangelistically inclined, won't stop being missionary minded, won't stop being active, won't stop proclaiming the truth and defending the faith, won't stop championing the cause of right against wrong.

A church that has stopped repenting or a Christian organization that stopped repenting, a missionary enterprise that has stopped repenting, an individual believer who stopped repenting will normally evidence their lack of repentance by multiplied activity in the name of Jesus Christ. That's the subtlety of it. That's the very subtlety of it.

Because the more successful we become in our enterprises the less are we conscious of our need of the one from whom alone there can be any legitimate activity. I indicated in the lecture this morning that you can only diagnose on the basis of normality. So although you could never of course relate this particular church in Ephesus to a perfect church on earth today because there is none and has been none and never will be any, the next best thing we can do is select maybe from the record given to us in the New Testament one of the churches of them all which brought perhaps more delight than any to the heart say of the Apostle Paul and maybe also to the heart of the Lord Jesus himself.

And if you turn to the first of Paul's epistles of the Thessalonians I think maybe we have such a church. In the first of his two epistles to the Thessalonians he says this, we give thanks to God always for you all making mention of our own prayers, the second verse of the first chapter. He says we give thanks to God always for you all.

He tells them in the 19th verse of the second chapter what is our hope, what is our joy, what is our crown of rejoicing, are not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming. He said you are our glory and our joy. These were folk who quite obviously were an unusual source of encouragement to the Apostle Paul, not like the Galatians or the Corinthians, they constantly burdened him, he would on occasions be in tears about those churches.

He said you became followers of us, verse 6 of chapter 1 and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost so that you were ensembles to all that believe in Macedonia and

Achaia. From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia but also in every place your faith to God is spread abroad so that we need not to speak anything. Your relationship to God is so patently obvious we do not have to add a word.

Then he goes on to say this, in the third verse, remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father. Your work of faith, your labor of love and your patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, not in the sight of men but in the sight of God. I am sure there must have been other occasions upon which you have related this that Paul has to say to the church in Thessalonica with what the Lord Jesus had to say to the church in Ephesus.

Let us compare the two. It says Paul in the first chapter of the epistles of the Thessalonians in the third verse, remembering without ceasing your work of faith. The Lord Jesus to the church in Ephesus, I know thy works.

Where is the faith? No faith. To the Thessalonians in the third verse, remembering without ceasing your labor of love, said the Lord Jesus to the church in Ephesus, I know thy works and thy labor. Where is the love? No love.

To the Thessalonians, remembering without ceasing your patience of hope to the church in Ephesus, I know thy works, no faith. I know thy labor, no love. I know thy patience, no hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

No expectation that stems from him, faith, love, hope, all missing in the evangelical machine that is now a successful enterprise that operates so smoothly that the only person that is no longer necessary is Jesus himself. You see there was no margin in this church between the program and what was reasonably possible. In other words, they were engaged in a heavy program of work that needed no faith to explain it.

Why not? Well, it was all underwritten. It was all carefully, meticulously organized. And if everything is already underwritten and carefully and meticulously organized, there's no need for faith.

That disposition that lets God be God in action, that invokes the activity of a second party, that allows God to demonstrate his deities. If you've got a program now that can be explained in terms of personnel, dollars, manpower, scholarship, business acumen, personality. If you've got a program that is being carefully and meticulously and adequately sustained by all those attributes that derive from man, apart from his relationship to God, you don't need faith.

Say, I'm on the way to heaven. You'll say, why? They say, well, I've been converted. But they won't know what it means to be converted, except that they've been through a procedure.

You see, when a doctor sticks a thermometer in his mouth, he wants to know what your temperature is. Why? Well, because he knows what your temperature ought to be, normality. And against normality, make a diagnosis of abnormality.

That's why he takes your blood pressure sometimes. That's why he counts your pulse sometimes. Because against normality, he'll know abnormality.

And if you're not much of a mechanic and something goes wrong with your car, you take it round to the workshop, hoping there may be someone there who knows how it ought to work. You're not very often successful. But you know perfectly well, if only you can find somebody who knows how it ought to work,

it's possible they'll shoot the trouble and discover abnormality, malfunction against normality and true function.

And we'll never be able to explain to people what happens when they're born again. We'll never be able to explain to people what God intended when they're redeemed, unless we know how he was intended to function and what went wrong. That was a little digression.

Back to the last chapter of Matthew's Gospel, the 28th. It says, In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, on that first Sunday morning, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. There they went, in the half-light of a breaking dawn, red-eyed, weary women, trudging along in the other records tell us that they were laden with spices and ointments.

Say, what were they going to do on that first Sunday morning, with their spices and ointments? What were they going to do? Embalm the dead body of their dead Jesus. On what morning? The third morning. So how much did they believe in the resurrection? They didn't believe in the resurrection, not one of them.

The only people who believed in the resurrection were the enemies of the Lord Jesus. That's why they set a guard and had it sealed. They were the only folk who were scared.

You don't need faith. And of course, that kind of a church will never, never, ever embark upon the impossible. It will determine that that is right, which is possible, instead of determining that that is possible, which is right.

How often today the criterion of being in God's will is that the financial means have been provided. Where in the Bible does it tell us we'll know God's will by the amount of finance that comes in? Is that true to the revelation of God's word? The fact that money has arrived for the project doesn't prove the project has its origin in the heart of God, it simply means that you're good at raising money. If the availability of funds for the given proposition is the evidence of God's smile of blessing and favor and confirmation, then the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, or for that matter the Communists, must be very much in favor.

I don't mean by that that God does not always provide for everything that he demanded, as he always does. But never as the seal of its rightness, simply as the evidence of its rightness, the consequence of its rightness. I never have to know that the thing is possible.

It's the last thing you have to know. All you have to know it's right. And to know that it's right demands a disposition, not to your circumstance, but a disposition towards Christ himself.

Weber engaged in work that needed no faith to explain it. We can think of a thousand and one illustrations of that in the scripture. Did Ishmael need any faith to explain him? What was the explanation for Ishmael? Well, the fact that Abraham had handled the situation.

He'd gone and committed with his wife, co-opted Hagar. Sarah put the motion to get God out of his dilemma, he having forgotten that I'm too old to bear and have always been barren. I suggest that you, Abraham, bear a son of this Egyptian servant girl, Hagar, and present that boy to God.

Was that a reasonable proposition? On human terms of reference, yes. It's the only way to get God out of his dilemma. This made it reasonably possible.

And the devil will always give to you and to me a reasonable alternative to faith. Was Abraham insincere? No, utterly dedicated. Dedicated to what? The will of God.

What was the will of God? He had to have a son. So said Abraham, I'm going to have a son even if it kills me. And in utter dedication to serve God, he produced Ishmael.

That's why you've got an oil crisis right now. A hundred thousand arrows. God said to Ishmael, their hand will be against every man.

That's why everybody who gets on the plane is searched in the 20th century. To Abraham, the proposition at last became possible by engineering human circumstance. That didn't make it right.

Some 15 years later, Isaac was born. Only one explanation for Isaac. God.

But it was a sheer impossibility. Yes, but God is the God of the impossible. And all that you and I have to know is that it's right, not that it's possible.

So long as it's right, even if it's impossible, it will become possible because God is the God of the impossible. That's what makes the Christian life so exciting, so thrilling. You see, Abraham had stopped repenting.

You see, repentance isn't a morbid introspection. Repentance isn't dragging out your old sins that have already been cleansed, forgiven and forgotten. There is a repentance, of course, where the Holy Spirit has alerted us to something that we have done that grieves God, where we should instantly confess that fact and claim instantly the cleansing that God has promised.

That is true. But continuous repentance from which the Christian life derives is not just that. Continuous repentance is a recognition of the fact that man, apart from God, is nothing, has nothing and can do nothing.

Supposing Abraham had maintained continuing repentance. When God said to him, you're going to have a son, he looked into God's face with a smile and said, God, you said it, I didn't. Humanly speaking, it's a sheer impossibility.

I'm an old man. Sarah, my wife, is barren, always has been, and now she's beyond the age of bearing. Humanly speaking, this is impossible.

But that isn't my embarrassment. Because God, I didn't say it to you, you said to me, that's all I need to know. Thanks.

I don't have to know that it's possible. All I have to know, God, is that you said it and it's right. Thanks.

What about a year later? Abraham would have looked into God's face and said, God, do you remember a year ago you said I was going to have a son by Sarah? I'll tell you something, God, it's a year less likely, because we're both a year older. But that doesn't worry me one tiny bit, God, because you said it, I didn't, that's not my dilemma, that's your dilemma. And I'm just thrilled to know that when you say something, you mean exactly what you say.

It's going to be exciting to see how I handle it. Four years later, Abraham would have looked into God's face and said, God, do you remember five years ago you said I was going to have a son by Sarah? It's

now five years less likely. And ten years later, he'd said, God, it's now ten years less likely.

That's tremendous, God, because you're still God and you still mean what you say. I haven't a clue how you're going to do it. I can't, but you can.

That's all I need to know. Thanks. And when would Isaac have been born? Exactly when he was born.

Dead on time. But there wouldn't have been an Ishmael and you wouldn't have an oil crisis. You see, the Bible is full of the tragic blunders made by men in misguided dedication who got enthusiastic for God, like the church in Ephesus.

The tragedy is, of course, that when any church, any missionary organization stops repenting, it becomes preoccupied with itself and stops being preoccupied with Christ. And the moment any church, any organization, any denomination, any missionary enterprise becomes preoccupied with itself and stops being preoccupied with Christ, it'll finally be preoccupied with its own perpetuation. It'll have to keep itself in business.

And I don't have to remind you folks that the history of the Christian church is strewn with the wreckage of what began in God the Holy Spirit and has ended up in limbo. Begins with a man, it becomes men, it turns into a movement and finally ends up as a monument. And all down the Christian way you've got the monuments of that which was sparked in the heart of God but was taken over by men.

And the moment the hand of man touches it, it dies. So they were engaged in work that needed no faith to explain it, and they were engaged in labor that needed no love to compel it. Because if there was no margin of difference between the program and what was reasonably possible, there was no margin of difference between the service rendered and the adequacy of the reward received.

Everybody got paid in one way or another for what they were doing. Not necessarily in cash but in kudos, position, recognition, position. And if it was work that needed no faith to explain and if it was labor that needed no love to compel it, the church was characterized by patience that needed no hope to sustain it.

No margin of difference between the program and what was reasonably possible, no margin of difference between the service rendered and the adequacy of the reward, and no margin of difference between what was patiently expected and what had already been carefully provided. Rather like what we call in England a faith tea, I think you call it a fellowship tea here. Everybody arrives patiently expecting what they know has already been provided.

All they try to do is avoid their own sausage rolls and eat what somebody else brought. And nobody is amazed when there's enough food, because we've already taken adequate steps to make quite sure there will be. What a lustreless church.

Nobody planned anything, nobody did anything, and nobody expected anything which wasn't reasonably possible, adequately rewarded, or already provided. Well that sounds like the local tennis club, or some political party. And Jesus said, repent or else.

The Christian life, if it is to be valid, no matter what area of activity in which you and I may be called to engage, whether it be preaching from the pulpit, or teaching in a Bible school, or carving our way through the jungles of southern Ecuador, everything to be legitimized must flow from the person of Jesus Christ, whose centrality can never be denied. Continuing repentance and continuing faith. Faith derives from

repentance.

You and I never exercise faith apart from repentance, because faith invokes the activity of a second party. Faith lets somebody else get into action, something or somebody else. So many misconceptions in the Christian life.

So often we hear the idea that the busier you are for God, that demonstrates your faith in God. Nonsense. The busier you are for God, the more you're demonstrating your lack of confidence in Him.

Our activity on God's behalf doesn't demonstrate our faith in God. The only thing that demonstrates our faith in God is the activity of God on our behalf in faithfulness, which responds to our faith. The faith that you're exercising in the chair you're sitting on isn't demonstrated by what you're doing for the chair.

The faith that you're exercising in the chair that you're sitting on is being demonstrated by the activity of the chair on your behalf. What the chair is doing for you. The only thing that evidences your faith in the chair is that the chair itself is allowed to be a chair in your experience, it's the only thing between you and the floor, that's all.

Are you sitting down on faith? No. You're sitting on a chair. All that your faith does is let the chair be a chair in your experience.

Ever tried sitting on faith? And if you sit on a chair and you don't land on the floor, it doesn't demonstrate the strength of your faith, it simply demonstrates the strength of the chair. It means that your faith is rightly exercised. If you sit on a chair and land on the floor, it doesn't prove the weakness of your faith.

It simply means that your faith is being exercised in the wrong object. If you have appendicitis and have to go to the surgeon, you don't demonstrate your faith in the surgeon by asking for the scalpel, rolling up your sleeves and saying, I'll do the job. If you get appendicitis and commit yourself to the surgeon, your faith in the surgeon will be demonstrated by the fact that you will allow him to anesthetize you and send you off into space while he takes care of your need.

For all you know, while you're unconscious, he could be cutting your throat. That's faith. Faith lets somebody or something come into action on your behalf.

That's the nature of faith. But you'll never let somebody come into action on your behalf until you recognize you can't do for yourself what you're waiting for them to do for you. So faith, to be valid, always derives from repentance.

And where you and I stop repenting, we'll stop exercising faith. Because the moment I stop repenting, I cease to reckon upon the one in whom I exercise my faith. Repentance simply faces the facts of life.

Repentance simply says, as I've reminded the folks over this weekend again and again, as you look into the face of God, I can't. You never said I could. That's what God is telling us all the time.

You never said I could. From beginning to end. Here's Gideon with thirty-two thousand.

What does God say about Gideon's thirty-two thousand? Send him home. And he sends twenty-two thousand home. God says, send the rest home.

Just except for a handful of three hundred. But God, I can't! Not with three hundred. He said, no, I never said you could.

As much as you couldn't even with thirty-two thousand. The only thing is if I did it when you had thirty-two thousand, you'd think you'd done it with your thirty-two thousand. Better send him home.

You can't! And God says to Joshua, Jericho, just march around. For the next six days, march around. And they went around.

And the first time they went around, they said, this is a piece of cheese. And so they went around the second time and saw how high the walls were. And then they went around the third time and saw how thick the walls were.

Then they went around the fourth time and they saw the ugly faces on the other side of the wall. By the sixth time they were saying, I can't! God said, no, I never said you could. And on the seventh day, God says, send them around seven times.

And by the seventh time, with blisters on their feet, all so weary, so exhausted, they could hardly carry the weapons. You can imagine Joshua looking in God's face and God said, we've been around this place thirteen times! My people are fit to quit! I can't! He said, no, I never said you could. Just blow the trumpet and shout.

And I'll show you who can. How much do we learn from the Bible, by and large? Even though we teach it and preach it, how much do we learn from it? Nothing. Because we constantly repeat the mistakes of which we're warned again and again and again.

We condemn ourselves by failing to learn from past history. All that God is asking of you and me, no matter what the office in which he may have placed us, is to recognize continuously, I am nothing, I have nothing, I can do nothing. Lord, I can't.

He never said I could. And almost with a sigh of relief, God says, thanks, you're right, but I can't. And I always said I would.

I've just been waiting for you to let me. To the church in Ephesus, with its busy program, with its strict morals, with its biblical accuracy, Jesus Christ said, repent. Get back to first base.

Back to where you belong. Back to the place from which you have fallen. Learn again the principles of the oracles of God.

That it takes God to be a man. And that God is patiently waiting to be that God. In any man will let him.

For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth looking for a man. A man, just a man, who's prepared to let God be God. Where now is the God of Elijah? And God said, just waiting for you, Elijah, that's all.

Just waiting for a man who'll be prepared to believe that I can be to one man what he has been to another. And the waters parted asunder. And Elijah went through on dry ground.

But in the last resort, every individual one of us has got to cross his own Jordan and discover God for ourselves. The only way to do so is to repent. I can't.

You never said I could. Then step out in faith and say, but you can. You always said you would.

And begin to reign in life by one Christ Jesus. There's nothing, nothing, nothing in all the world so exciting, so marvelous as repentance that teaches us the kind of faith that lets God get into business. And ladies and gentlemen, if there's one thing more than another that the students in this place or any other school, our own, throughout the world need to learn more than anything else is repentance.

And the tragedy is, and I know that you agree with me in this, that thousands of men and women are coming out of our Bible institutes, schools and seminaries who've never learned repentance. But who've learned on the basis of academic distinction, by the boost of their ego in the development of their own prowess and gifts and talents, to step out as though God were deeply grateful that he had got them on his side. Who throw out their chests and say, I'm going to do big things for God.

And God is utterly unimpressed. We shall have some 600 young men and women in our Bible schools during this current 12 month period, 400 of them at this moment in residence. And when it's my privilege to speak to them, as I seek all over the world so to do, I tell them this.

If you've got a photographic mind, you can memorize all the facts, you can get the answers right, and by the end of your time here in the terminal exams you can come top of the list. But I'll tell you something, if you haven't learned that you're nothing and Christ is everything, that all you're fit for is the cross where God puts you in the person of another, his son, and that Jesus Christ alone is the one who living within you has got what it takes to live the Christian life or accomplish anything, and you're not prepared to appropriate that fact and in repentance recognize that you can't and in faith believe that he can. Though you've come top of the list, you've failed and so have we, abysmally.

And that's a fact. Because it's my sad privilege to minister to such failures all over the world, in every area of Christian ministry. And if I had one plea to make, more than another, to all the Bible schools or colleges in the world, it's this, please, please, please don't take two, three, four years to train men to be failure in their ministry.

Because they've never ever come to know God for themselves. They've never learned to repent. Now let's pray.

Dear Lord, we're so slow to learn. You've given us a whole Bible, which from end to end teaches us the utter, pathetic, abysmal inadequacy of man. But the thrilling, fabulous, fantastic, overwhelming adequacy of God.

And somehow we miss the point. We teach men to be man-sized for God, instead of teaching men to let God be God-sized in a man. Forgive us for the measure in which we have failed.

So to exalt you, Lord Jesus, in the hearts of men, that in genuine repentance they'll be prepared to enter into all the good of that for which your blood was shed, on the basis of that redemptive act by that spiritual resurrection, to put God back into the man. We thank you for the testimony of this school and the young men and women who are here in their sincere desire to know you. Grant that none may leave the threshold of this place without sincerely knowing God for themselves.

We know then, sent, numbered amongst those who went, they'll be put, drawing upon the illimitable resources of deity, and nothing will shake them. We will have discharged our office. We will have preached ourselves out of business, because the King is back in his kingdom, and in his dear name.

Amen. Here, the apostle testifies, the one of whom he speaks in the first chapter of his gospel. In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, was God, by him all things were made, without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life, real life, and this life was the light of men. And says John, that which was from the beginning, which we've heard, which we've seen with our eyes, which we've looked upon, and our hands have handled. What do you mean by that? He says we touched him.

In the beginning was the Word, the Word was in the upper room, when we didn't want the cross, and didn't believe in the resurrection, and were filled with confusion, utterly downcast and depressed, waiting only to be done to death. He appeared in our midst and showed us his hands and his feet, and says John, we touched him. Our hands have handled of the Word of life.

The life was manifested he says, we've seen it, we bear witness, we show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested unto us. Eternal life manifested to them. How was eternal life manifested? In the person of Jesus Christ, who is that life? For this is the record he goes on to tell us in the fifth chapter, that God has given to us eternal life, and that life which is eternal is in his Son.

He that has the Son has what the Son is, life. He that doesn't have the Son doesn't have life. He was manifested unto us.

Verse three, that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, for both are alive. And these things, verse four, these things write we unto you says John, that your joy may be full. We want you to have the same full-blooded, robust, healthy, adventuresome joy that became ours in the day in the upper room that Jesus stood in our midst and we touched in.

New joy. What was the second consequence of their rediscovery of Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection? You'll find it in Luke 24, verse 44, he said to them, these are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning me. From the beginning to the last verse of the last chapter of the Old Testament scripture said the Lord Jesus, these are the things which I spake unto you while I was with you.

You listened but you didn't hear.

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