

# Blessed Repentance

by Richard E. Bieber

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*The sermon highlights the essential role of repentance in receiving God's forgiveness and living a vibrant Christian life.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 3:8, Matthew 9:5, Luke 5:32, Luke 15:1, Luke 15:11, Luke 15:20, Luke 15:25, Acts 3:19, 1 John 1:9

**Topics:** "Repentance", "Forgiveness"

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## Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the core of the Lord's gospel, emphasizing God's desire to forgive sinners, which is good news for those who recognize their need for forgiveness. He highlights the aggressive nature of God's forgiveness, comparing it to the parables of the lost sheep and coin where God goes to great lengths to save and rejoice over repentant sinners. Bieber stresses the importance of repentance as the key to receiving God's forgiveness and healing in our lives, urging believers to constantly turn back to God in humility and confession. He explains that repentance involves emptying ourselves of pride, confessing our sins to God, receiving His forgiveness with a childlike heart, and showing forgiveness to others as evidence of true repentance.

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## Transcript

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15: 1-10

The core of the Lord's gospel, that actually makes it a gospel --- "good news" --- is the word from God that

God's desire is to forgive.

I know a lot of people are bored by that thought because they don't seem to feel any need of forgiveness.

But for those who know themselves to be sinners, that is tremendous news.

The people who heard Jesus talking like this were hearing something for the first time in their lives. They had never heard anyone representing God tell them such things. That God is not looking for excuses to destroy us because of our sins, but, on the very opposite extreme, He is looking for every possible means He can use short of violating our wills, to save us, to forgive us.

God's forgiveness is aggressive.

Like the man who forsakes his ninety-nine sheep, leaves them in the wilderness, and goes after the one that's lost.

Turns the wilderness upside-down,  
scours the countryside until he finds that one sheep.

Or the woman who turns her house upside-down searching for the one coin until she finds it.

Now it is the forgiveness of God that heals our lives.

Heals everything in us that needs to be healed. Everything that is wrong.

"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"--he then said to the paralytic--"Rise, take up your bed and go home." (Matthew 9:5-6)

When we are looking at Jesus hanging on the cross,

we are looking at God going to the ultimate extreme to forgive us. Breaking His own heart that we might be delivered.

And yet, though we have this river of divine forgiveness flowing closer to us than our breath, most of us are still living in a desert.

On the one side of this river of forgiveness

is the desert of guilt and

on the other side of this river of forgiveness

is the desert of laxity.

And most of us are in one or the other of these places.

Many of us are spending all our time under a cloud of guilt.

We don't seem to have any joy in God.

We are blocked from any peace.

Or from doing anything useful by a condemning heart.

Others of us are so lax.

We have allowed a dozen things to crowd God out of our lives.

We still continue to go through the motions of faith, but we're hollow inside.

Why should this be?

Why should we, who have tasted the stream of forgiveness,

revert back to being hollow men and women,

or guilt ridden neurotics, when that river of life flows right by our side?

And the reason is...we have failed to do the one thing that is necessary for God's forgiveness to get inside of us...

we have forgotten how to repent!

And then we wonder why nobody repents when we bring the gospel to them.

How can we expect to bring people to repentance when we, ourselves, are not living in repentance?

How can we call people to come down into that pool of repentance when we aren't standing in it ourselves?

The most refreshing exercise we can engage in, not only when we first come to faith, but all through this life of flesh and blood, is repentance.

To be resilient enough, childlike enough to constantly turn back and repent.

I'm not talking about wilfully going out and doing evil with the idea that by 3:30 this afternoon I'll repent.

You know...Forever going out and getting drunk and then repenting,

going out and again getting drunk and then repenting

and considering this to be normal.

In fact, when I begin to live a life of repentance, it won't be necessary for me to go on doing these stupid things I do.

Many of us have come to think of repentance as a negative thing.

"I've blown it again now I have to repent. I'll never make it."

But repentance as our Lord calls us to it, is a positive thing.

It is the doorway to life.

Every time I repent before the Living God, I am visited by God.

Repentance always brings God into me.

Luke 15 begins with these two parables; the lost sheep and the lost coin which both end with the description of how much joy there is in heaven over our repentance.

And these parables are really a description of what repentance is from God's side. We see God going to all these extremes, going all out to deliver us... to save us.

In the case of the sheep, the sheep doesn't do anything but wait until finally the shepherd catches up to him.

And the coin can't do anything. It has to lie in the chink, until the woman comes and finds it.

But in the third parable of Luke 15, Jesus now begins to tell us what's involved in repentance from the human side. That something has to take place inside the heart of his prodigal son in order that he might be restored to his father. It's not something only God does, but it has to be something that we do too.

"And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father." Luke 15:11-20a

Notice in this instance, the father does not go chasing after the son,

grab him by the collar,

drag him back home,

and force him to eat the fatted calf.

The father waits until the son decides to turn his heart around. Until the son repents.

This holds not only for the sinner who has never tasted God's mercy.

It also holds for those of us who have experienced God's mercy and come into all of this and then have gradually drifted into a life of lukewarm mediocrity.

And those of us who are dwelling in that lukewarm pool of mediocrity complain that we can't seem to sustain our faith over any length of time.

We believe for a while and then it seems to die away.

Our vision of God evaporates.

What we don't understand is that the life of faith is a life of repentance.

Turning back to God ... all the time.

That's what it is.

Jesus lived the life of faith and he had no sin to repent of and yet,

Jesus was constantly turning into his Father's will.

Denying himself. "Not my will, but thine be done."

Learning obedience through the things which he suffered.

And for us, this turning to the Father is repentance. It's the absolute requirement of having any of that flow of forgiveness coming into us.

There is no way we can learn to live a life of faith until we learn to live a life of repentance.

Until it becomes a daily thing,

hourly, moment-by-moment matter of living in repentance,

our vision of God, will evaporate, and our hearts will get hard, and our minds will be formed by the atmosphere of the world around us...

...even if we live in a red-hot Christian community or on an island in the middle of nowhere trying to stay away from the world.

Repentance begins by emptying ourselves of our pride.

"How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father..."

Now this man knew all along that his father's hired servants were eating better than he was, but he wouldn't admit it. And we're the same way. It's as if he was saying, "If I have to starve to death, I'm not going to come down off my high horse."

And so he perishes with hunger until he finally faces the truth.

Every time you and I experience any kind of estrangement from God, our pride is getting in the way. Every single time. No exceptions. And we say to ourselves, "I have nowhere to turn.

There's no way out of this."

But we do have someplace to turn. There is help, if we will come down off our pedestal and give up our vanity.

Perhaps, for instance, you're giving your wife or your husband the silent treatment and it's beginning to become just as unpleasant for you as for your mate.

And moreover, you know very well this is hindering your prayers. But you've invested three whole days of misery in this campaign.

You don't want to lose now...

God offers you healing for this mess if you will swallow your pride and repent.

Repentance involves confession to God.

Every kind of corporate worship that has been engaged in by believers has developed into some kind of liturgy.

Perhaps it's the Quakers or people who say, "We are just going to wait on the Spirit and say nothing until He comes."

Or the Eastern Orthodox folks who chant for hours as they seek to open themselves up to the holiness of God. All corporate worship develops into some kind of structure.

Your body needs bones...structure. You wouldn't be able to breathe if you didn't have a skeleton. You'd be a blob lying on the floor. You'd suffocate in no time.

And the brothers and sisters in the faith all down through history have always understood that corporate worship begins with confession.

"O, God, our Heavenly Father, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. That we have sinned against thee..."

Or as we said today, "I confess unto thee today that I have grievously sinned against thee in many ways, not only by outward transgressions, but also by secret thoughts and desires which I cannot fully understand."

And then we have to start to get specific, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee and am no longer worthy to be called your son."

How many times there is some definite thing inside us.....

And we know what it is, we know it, but we won't even utter it to God.

We won't name it.

You know the thoughts that have been going through your head.

And you know the things that have crossed your lips while on the telephone.

We could make a long list.

We know what these things are doing to us. But we won't even name them to God.

And we can't say we have repented until we have named these things that we know about to Him.

Name them.

Say it.

Tell him.

After that, repentance involves the receiving of God's forgiveness with a childlike heart.

And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'

Once the father welcomes the son home and begins to shower him with love, the son doesn't make some big production of his unworthiness.

He's confessed his unworthiness.

Now as the father blesses him,

showers him with good things,

the son receives it with childlike joy.

It is the epitome of pride to say, "No", when God stretches forth his hand to forgive you.

Receive that forgiveness with joy and give thanks when Jesus says to you, "Your sins are forgiven."

Receive it and praise him.

And when you come to the Lord's table to eat the bread and drink the wine,

don't grovel.

Eat and drink with joy. It is the food of forgiveness paid for by the death of your Lord.

It makes you worthy because you are unworthy.

And you are invited to this table so receive it with joy, thanksgiving, and praise in your heart!

Finally, repentance always involves turning around and showing those around us the forgiveness that we have received from God. Always.

"Bring forth fruits that befit repentance and don't say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father.'"

And the fruits that befit repentance are always the fruits of forgiveness.

Forgiveness to the people we live with that perhaps we feel are taking us for granted. And we walk around with an attitude in our hearts!

Get rid of it and forgive them.

Pray God's blessing on them.

Or the people we wish would try to understand us and they never even try. Forgive them!

Get it out of your head and don't talk about it any more.

Instead of having attitudes towards strangers you don't even know -- mercy.

Instead of cynicism toward everything around us --- mercy.

Instead of suspicion, all the time suspicion --- mercy.

Deeds of mercy.

Words of mercy.

And especially prayers of mercy.

These are the fruits of repentance.

If these fruits of repentance are not found in our lives, our repentance has no more substance than cotton candy. We could cry crocodile tears until 5:00 tonight. But if we don't go out and bear the fruits that befit repentance, it didn't mean one thing.

"But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father...'"

There is not an hour of our lives that our hearts are not inclined to go back to that far country. To that desert of unreal thoughts, false experiences, unforgiveness.

And every time we do, the Spirit of God nudges us, encourages us to remember that the Father waits for us if we will but turn.

Why should we spend another minute in that desert when a stream of life flows right by us, and all we have to do is stoop down and drink?

If we want to live a life of faith,

if we seriously desire to walk in God's peace, practice God's love,

if it is our earnest desire to have a word from God that will be life for those whom we serve,

we are going to have to make repentance our way of life.

Even if we have to repent a million times a day.

Because every time we do, the Father is there waiting.

Every time.

Even now.

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