

The Need of Repentance
Edward Baer
From *The Visitor*, November 1930

When Jesus began His ministry, He preached this message: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17).

This was the kernel of His message to all who had not yet heeded it and accepted Him as their King and Lord. It was His message to those who had not yet been awakened by God's message, and who had not yet turned from their wrong course of life.

It is a striking thing that the Lord made this plea and command — for it is both a plea and a command — the essence of the beginning of the Gospel. And though this is striking, it is not strange. It is a very logical thing that Christ should have called on His hearers to do this, and that He placed it before them as a vital duty. For it was absolutely necessary that they should recognize themselves not as they would like to have prided themselves to be, but rather as they were in God's sight: and this was very different.

These people needed to see how high God's standard was, and it was necessary for them to realize that they were sinners. Besides this, it was necessary for them, moved from within, to choose to humble themselves and to admit that they were sinners. Then it was needful also to start on a very different path.

Only in this way could they be ready for the kingdom of God in its dual sense - both that it should come within them, as Christ said to His disciples, and also that they should be ready to enter the kingdom in which nothing evil shall enter, but which the Lord Jesus will set up and which will be an eternal kingdom.

But as pertinent and necessary as it was in the time when our Lord was on earth that men should repent in order to receive His kingdom, and to be prepared to enter it, it is no less needful and important today. *For everyone needs the Savior*, and a person cannot share in the salvation which Christ has brought through the shedding of His blood, unless one does humble himself before the Lord, recognizing: "I have sinned. I cannot stand as I am before God's righteous judgement. I must have a Savior." One finds that not only has he done wrong, but that his heart *is* evil and needs to be changed. It needs to be purified and given new impulses and made responsive to God's Spirit.

If a person sees these things, and sees with shame and penitence that his life has been so unworthy and sinful that he is undone without the Savior, and if he can truly call, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" — then is he given the opportunity to take another very important step in repentance: it is, after he has thus begun to face himself and God, that he go further and act in accord with that knowledge.

And what does this imply? Can it mean anything less than that one must *confess* and *forsake* his sin (Proverbs 28:13)? As long as a person is not willing to do the latter, he is not penitent. And unless he becomes willing to do the former, he will not be able to leave and to conquer sin. But if one comes wholeheartedly to the Lord and faces the light as Zacchaeus did (Luke 19:2-8), and if he seeks, so far as it is possible, to make restitution for wrongs done to others — if he comes to the Lord in that spirit — he shall believe surely that the Lord has died for him. And in Christ he shall, through faith, find forgiveness of his sins.

For to heal and to save from sin was the purpose of Christ's coming (Luke 19: 10; 1 John 3:8). That is also His purpose in calling souls to repentance. The Lord commands that men should repent, not because He would deprive them of anything worthwhile but because He would heal them and forgive their sins. And this is impossible so long as they persist in their sins.

Yes, so long as a person is self-righteous or feels self-sufficient he cannot come to Christ. The Lord met some such people, and He said that the prostitutes and tax-gatherers (these latter many of whom were dishonest) would go into the kingdom of God before they. Many of those who were gross sinners recognized their condition and repented, but such who held that they were "good enough" rejected the Lord and lost their opportunity.

But still now the call goes forth to hearts who do have a need. The kingdom of heaven is being brought close to those who hear this call of Christ: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And what greater blessing can there be than to heed that call today while it is still the day of opportunity and salvation?

It is a great privilege to turn to God, but it is also an earnest duty. God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

And it is written: "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." And that is still our plea as messengers for Christ. *He* invites and promises: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30).

This article appeared in the "Truth for our Time" column in the "Christian Friendship Messenger", and is prepared by the Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean) Communications Committee. Comments or questions can be directed to: ACCNcommunications@gmail.com