

**REPENTANCE - KNOWING WHY AND KNOWING HOW - Both Are Important - Part eight - Sunday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020, 6:30 p.m.**

**Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

**REPENTANCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A GREAT LIFE**

**Luke 3:1-6 - "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, [2] during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness. [3] And he went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. [4] As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. [5] Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, [6] and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."**

**Isaiah 40:3-5 - "A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. [4] Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. [5] And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."**

There is really no escaping the emphasis of John the Baptist as he quotes the prophet Isaiah. He's applying the prophet's words to the ***process of change*** that needs to take place in lives as the coming and entrance of the kingdom of God makes its approach in Jesus Christ, God the Son, the promised Messiah.

It's like the ***building of a highway***. The changes are more than ***cosmetic*** changes. They're ***foundational changes, radical changes, permanent changes***, and they're ***ongoing changes***.

Fundamentally, this is what ***repentance*** is all about. In the very first message in this series we saw that repentance is, at its very core, rooted in two important concepts: Repentance is ***a radical upheaval in the human will***. And, secondly, repentance is ***an ongoing reshaping of the human life***.

Repentance - **“metanoeo”** - **meta** (after or following), and **noeo** (to perceive with the mind). Repentance is what you **do** after you understand what the Holy Spirit is now saying to your mind. And this process never comes to an end in this earthly life - **“My sheep hear my voice and they follow Me.”** That is Jesus’ way of describing the **process of repentance** in people who want to stay in touch with Him, who want to **follow** Him.

This is vastly underemphasized in modern Christianity. We have reduced the Christian faith to mere **profession**, or **mere indoctrination** rather than this dynamic **reshaping and transforming** of the whole life. We are constantly called to **Monday repentance**. It’s what you **do** on Monday with the truth you learn on **Sunday** that counts.

We’ve all heard of Tony Campollo’s sermon, **“It’s Friday, but Sunday’s Coming!”** But things are changing in the church. Tragically, the world is shaping the church as much as the church is shaping the world. Perhaps it’s time for another emphasis. Perhaps we need to start reminding ourselves that **“it’s Sunday, but Monday’s coming!”** Monday is the proof of Sunday truth. Monday’s the **actual implementation of the truth we receive in the dry run practice of Sunday**.

That’s why we’re in this series on repentance. Monday Christianity is the only kind of Christianity that counts with Jesus. It’s what you **do after** you come to **understand** that validates genuine repentance and life in Jesus.

On our last teaching I said there were **two processes** that are ongoing in healthy spiritual formation. The two terms we are considering are **confrontation** and **construction**. Last week we studied the **confrontational** nature of John the Baptist. He’s used, in all his repulsive glory, to crash directly into the Pharisees and religious

professors of his day. He pulls down their trust in mere tradition and religious routine. John wakes things up and shakes things up. Nothing good can happen in the hearts of spiritually sleepy people.

Sleepy people will never truly repent. Complacent people will never deeply repent. So we need - all of us - to sit and listen to John the Baptist thunder for a little while. There is a horrible tendency in the church to shuffle the whole issue of repentance off into a corner where the really bad people are. Thieves need to repent. Homosexuals need to repent. Adulterers need to repent. Blasphemers need to repent. Liars and thieves need to repent.

This is how religious people **dodge** the cutting edge of repentance in their own lives. We limit the need for repentance to situations that are so **shocking** and **obvious** that we deflect it away from ourselves.

And here's the problem with that: **Only people who feel the need to repent, ever receive the blessings and power repentance brings.** In fact, Jesus said the really **obvious** sinners had a much easier time coming to Him than the religious crowd:

**Matthew 21:31-32 - "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. [32] For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him."**

This religious crowd **refused to be confronted**. Their real problem wasn't just their **sin**. The hookers were sinners, but that didn't keep them out of the kingdom. God has grace easily rich enough to cleanse us from **all** sin. No, the religious crowd couldn't find life in

Jesus, not because they were **sinner**s, but because they refused to be **confronted** and **freshly humbled** by their sin. Their religion had put them spiritually to sleep! They no longer **saw** themselves as needing to repent. Religion still does that to a lot of people today.

So last Sunday night we studied **confrontation** first because it opens the door for **construction**. This week we'll conclude this series by looking at Isaiah's words, specifically as they relate to the **constructing of a great life for God**:

### 1) ISAIAH LIKENS REPENTANCE TO A CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

Isaiah's words deserve very careful attention:

**Isaiah 40: 3-5** - "A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. [4] Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. [5] And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

True, confrontation comes first - the **high places are leveled out and made low**. The glory of the Lord will never flow through a life that's already high and lifted up in its own eyes. **Pride** is the first thing that must go if genuine repentance is to be perpetually fruitful in my life.

This is the pride that softens the blow of confrontation. John came on the scene with such a strikingly simple message: "**Prepare the way for the Lord, and make straight paths for Him!**" And **instantly** the religious crowd comes back with, "**We have Abraham as our father!**"

Behold the instantaneous reflex response of **pride**. Pride of position. Pride of religious tradition. The pride that would separate itself from those who **didn't** have Abraham as their father, and hence, really **needed** to repent!

But for those who are humble enough to yield to the cutting edge of repentance, something very precious begins to happen. The leveling out of the high spots isn't just for our embarrassment or belittling. It's to **fill in the low spots** - **"Every valley will be lifted up."**

Here's the important issue here: How do you view the confronting, frequently forbidding, restricting, and even painful voice of the Holy Spirit in your life? What do you see God doing when He doesn't give in to the direction of your own inclinations and tastes and priorities? Most see this process as a purely **negative** thing. But this is not so at all.

2) **THE PAIN OF PRESENT CONFRONTATION MUST BE SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF GOD'S FUTURE PLAN OF GLORY FOR OUR LIVES**

Repentance only **feels** negative. It never finally **is** negative. Isaiah paints with the marvelously descriptive brush about the **big picture** of repentance. He wants us to see the results of **confrontation** in terms of the completed **construction** of our lives:

**Isaiah 40:3** - **"....In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."**

**"A highway for our God."** What a wonderful phrase! I know Isaiah looks

prophetically down the road to the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. But Messiah hasn't come as a **political** or **national** deliverer even yet. That won't happen until Jesus comes again at the end of the age. Yet John the Baptist, in his day, applied these words to the preparation of the people's hearts for Jesus Christ.

Don't miss the simple message here. **"Prepare a highway for our God!"** That's the goal of the Spirit's construction process. And **ongoing repentance** is the tool He wants to use to accomplish that goal. John likens repentance to the **deepening and broadening of the flow of God's grace and glory through our lives**. He says it's like **building a new highway!**

I can still remember when they pushed the 404 up to Newmarket. I can remember reading in the papers how they had to re-dig the foundations for the Vandorf overpass twice because it kept slowly sinking into the soft ground underneath.

Those massive pillars weren't crumbling or falling apart. **I** couldn't see anything at all wrong with them. They looked good to me. But the experts knew things I didn't know. I just wanted that crazy highway finished. They had all sorts of studies about the **final weight** that overpass would have to bear once it was completed. They probably had statistics about the **flow of traffic** it would have to bear.

And the experts knew that, in its present condition, it would never be able to **bear the weight** of all the engineer wanted to create and sustain there.

That's the idea exactly. Not one of us can see our own future. We simply do not have the capacity to accurately measure what God wants, eventually, to do in our lives. All we know is the **voice of the Shepherd**. All we know is the **present call to repentance** in specific areas of either **specific points of rebellion**, or, perhaps

more commonly, areas where we're being called to ***press the Lordship of Jesus in deeper and more sacrificial ways.***

And there's something else none of us gets to ever see in this earthly life. We never get to see, ***perhaps fortunately***, all that our lives ***could have been*** if we had repented more deeply and more frequently and more thoroughly than we did.

But there is a Master designer. He knows his complete will and plan for our lives. And the road of wisdom, which is missed by many Christians, is to ***see the small steps of repentance*** that come to each of us, day by day, as somehow ***more important to our future than we imagine.***

The trick is to see our lives from God's perspective rather than our own. Do you just see your Christian life as casting your ballot for heaven instead of hell? Or do you see it as the ongoing ***construction of a highway for the glory of God to move in and through your life?***

Keep this Biblical picture in your mind - ***the building of a highway.*** More than anything else I know, repentance is how you ***keep your life going somewhere in God!***

And also, remember this, ***repentance almost always has to do with confronting pride and fear***: "I'm not living any worse than the other people I know in this church" That's pride. "I'm doing fairly well, perhaps better than average, spiritually already." Again, that's pride.

"If I start living my life like you're talking about, Pastor Don, my boyfriend or girlfriend won't love me anymore. I'll be so lonely!" That's fear. "If I really start walking before the Lord like this, Pastor Don, I'll have to make things right with

people who have wronged me!” That’s pride.

“If I give my life so totally to the Lord, He might call me into the ministry and I want to be a doctor!” That’s fear.

“If I really come clean in all areas of my life it will require exposing things about myself that I have kept under wraps for years. What will people think?” That’s fear **and** pride.

Repentance **always** involves confronting fear and pride. The **high** places are made low and the **valleys** are lifted up. But **remember the process isn’t the same as the goal**. And the process rarely **feels** the same as the tremendous goal God has through the repentant heart. The glory of the Lord will begin to flow through your life in all its beauty and power!

I know this will work for you. I know it for certain because the promise is made in such certain words. And I can’t think of a better promise with which to wrap up this series - **Isaiah 40:5b** - “....for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”