

A Change Will Do You Good

PRAYER- Lord Jesus, our hearts struggle between a deep desire to change and a stubborn fear of change. Would you please intervene this morning and help us pursue the changes you want in us today? Will you speak to us by Your Word and Your Spirit and help us not just learn about repentance this morning—help us practice repentance. In Jesus Name, Amen

Many years ago the coach for the Baltimore Orioles baseball team was a man named Earl Weaver. He was famous for his reaction to what he considered a bad call. He would angrily charge over to the umpire and shout, "Are you gonna get any better, or is this it?"

Do you ever ask yourself this question? "Am I ever gonna get any better, or is this it?"

It's a question many people struggle with at the beginning of a new year. It's the season when some of us make resolutions to become better people. We resolve to quit smoking or drinking, lose a bit of weight, revise and stick to a budget, spend more time with the family, attend church more often, read your Bible more, pray and witness, along with lots of other things we ought to have been doing all year.

There are usually those moments when we realize we need some changes that will do us good. Deep inside we long to change, and yet at the same time, most of us have a built-in resistance to real changes.

A man came home one day and saw a plaque his wife put on the kitchen wall. It said..."**Prayer changes things!**" Later, the wife notices the plaque missing. She confronts her husband, "Don't you like prayer?" He answers, "Of course I like prayer, but I don't like change!"

Mark Twain once remarked that the only person who likes change is a wet baby.

To a large extent this is true. But I believe it's also true that almost everybody would admit there is always room for improvement. Everybody wants to become a better person, but we aren't really sure how or even if that's possible. How can you and I experience a change that will do us good?

I think the one place we need to start is with one single word: repentance. Before any and every lasting change in our lives, there must be repentance. Before a revival becomes real, there must be repentance. Before you and I will ever become the people God created us to be, there must be repentance. Repentance is the key that unlocks the door to the changes that will do you and I the most good. I want to suggest to you some help in this area from God's Word found in **Luke 3:1-22**.

Why is it so important that we change in the first place? Doesn't God love us just like we are? Why should we spend all that time and effort making changes? Well, the first reason I see in vs. 1-6 is, God calls us to make changes that will do us good.

Every one of the 4 Gospels in the Bible begins not with the ministry of Jesus, but with the ministry of John the Baptist. Why? Why not just plunge right in to Jesus' life and ministry?

Maybe it's because John is such an interesting character. Matthew's Gospel records John as a loner, living out in the desert, dressing in camel's hair clothes, munching on Honey Bunches of Locusts. I've always had an image of John as a wild-eyed, weird looking, shouting prophet. I imagine little kids who see him running to their parents, scared of this fiery preacher.

But Luke tells us this strange man is, **God's man**---a messenger to whom in verse 2 says, "the word of God came to(John)...then in verses. 4-6 say that, John is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about the forerunner of the Messiah, the prophet who will prepare the world for Messiah's arrival.

What is John's message? Verse. 3 makes it plain: And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,...

Matthew 3:1-2 reads..."**In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea**", and then goes on to say..."**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!**"

Repent! This was John's message. But what does it mean to repent? The Greek word Luke originally used here is **Metanoia** which means a change of mind or purpose, always for the better. John preaches a baptism of rebuilding or 'healing', that is, he baptized people as a sign that they had truly turned away from sin and turned to God. Through John, God called for everybody to repent.

But John was not the last preacher to call for repentance.

Matthew again in chapter 4:17 from that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

When Jesus begins His ministry, He echoes John's call for a change. Jesus says that before you enter the kingdom of heaven, you must repent.

But this wasn't the last time Jesus calls for repentance. In the last book of the Bible, the Book of the Revelation, Jesus dictates 7 letters to the apostle John, addressed to the church of Jesus Christ, calling no less than 6 times for His own people to repent.

I've reflected on these echoes of repentance to make a point: God calls all of us to repentance.

He calls those who have never been born again through faith in Jesus Christ to repent. We need to change our minds about our sins: to realize that we stand guilty before a holy God, in need of forgiveness. We need to change our minds about Christ: to believe in Him as our Savior from sin, and surrender our lives to Him as Lord over our lives. Without repentance, we cannot be saved.

But He also calls you and I who have been born again to a lifestyle of repentance. Our position and direction are changed when we experience salvation, but after salvation comes sanctification---the process through which we become more and more like Jesus Christ.

You haven't arrived at perfection here in this life, and neither have I. The Holy Spirit is still working on us, convicting us, showing us more and more areas where He wants to make us more and more like Christ. He is continually calling on us to keep changing for the better to become more and more like Jesus.

This may come as a shock to some people. If you're not a Christian you may feel like you're good enough right now without Christ. You may not really want to repent and believe the Gospel, that you don't really want the changes that Jesus will bring to your life. God gives you the free will to make this decision. But the Bible makes it crystal clear that unless we repent, we will never know God and never go to heaven. Twice Jesus said in the Gospel of Luke ... **I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.**

On the other hand, some people may say "I've been a Christian for 10-20-30-40 years or more! I've done all the repenting I ever need to do". But have you? I know we get rid of all the obvious, gross sins when we first get saved. But sin can be very deceptive, become harder to spot---sins of pride, unforgiveness, lust, jealousy---hidden, acceptable sins we think don't really matter much to God. The same Jesus who called His people to repent in Revelation still calls on His people to repent today. What is Jesus calling us to repent of right now?

Every now and then in a football or basketball game, some poor player gets totally turned around and begins running toward the wrong goal. When that happens, his coaches and teammates don't stand by passively and politely suggest he rethink his plan. They scream and yell LOUDLY for him to stop and turn around---NOW!

Do we hear God's call for us to repent this morning? I don't know your heart. I cannot tell you what sins God is putting His finger on right now. But you know. Don't push His conviction away. Hear Him calling, and repent today. It's a change that will do you good.

In our reading this morning, there were many people who came to hear God's call for repentance, through John's preaching, and you'd think John would have been happy to baptize them all. But that's not what happened, is it? Verses 7-14 tells us some of the folks who come to John to be baptized get berated. John has some pretty harsh words for what verse. 7 calls ...**the multitudes**...who are more clearly identified in the parallel passage in

Matthew 3:7... **But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"**

One Pharisee turns to his buddy standing beside him and asks “Did I hear him right? Did he just call us a bunch of snakes?” Are you talking to me?

John’s words here would seem incredible to a Pharisee or Sadducee, because in their own minds, they were the God’s favorite people. They are His favorite people not only because they are Jews and descendants of Abraham, but because they tried very hard to strictly live by the Law of Moses. They were holier than your average person.

So if they’re so holy, why come to John to be baptized? Maybe they were just trying to cover all their bases. They think this wild preacher is one fry short of a Happy Meal, but just in case, I’ll let him dunk me, just to be on the safe side.

They are willing to be baptized, but one thing they’re not willing to do: repent. They don’t think they need to. They’re good, moral, religious people.

But John calls them snakes. John, buddy, what have you got against these men? He explains the problem in verses 8-9: **Your repentance is not real, because it produces no fruit.** They think they can cover up their sins with their religion, but John says it won’t work. If your repentance doesn’t produce fruit, it’s not real, and if it’s not real it won’t do you any good at all.

On the other hand, in verse 10, there are some other folks standing around who want real change in their lives, because they ask the all important question that makes repentance real: what shall we do? John tells them in verses 11-14:

Instead of ignoring the needs of your neighbor, love them enough to share with them.

Instead of stealing money, work to make an honest living.

Instead of treating people wrong, treat them right.

Do you notice John’s emphasis here? The fruit of repentance shows up in what you do. A changed mind produces a changed life, which produces a change of behavior. Real repentance shows up in what you do.

Not in good intentions. Not in what we do in church. Not in empty religion or rituals. In what we do, in how we live. This is a change that will do you good.

It’s awfully easy to settle for a cosmetic change rather than a real change.

I heard of a man who wept every time he testified about his love for Jesus, who loved to talk about the Bible and how good God was to him. What nobody knew until later was he had a bad habit of being abusive to his wife.

It is so easy to think that just because we come to church, that just because we are involved in the leadership, that just because you preach a sermon, that because we really meant to do better, it's enough to make our sins not matter. But it's not. If repentance is real, it will change not only our minds, but our whole lives—including our behavior.

Some time ago, Caleb did a message series that shared and mirrored the 12 steps of alcohol recovery. This is the fifth step.....

Step 5: Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

Repentance won't make you perfect, at least not in this life. I know I'm nowhere near perfect, and I assume you aren't either. I still pray Forgive me Lord my debts, as I forgive my debtors practically every time I pray. Even preachers need to confess and repent.

Four preachers met for a friendly gathering. During the conversation one preacher said, "Our people come to us and pour out their hearts, confess certain sins and needs. Let's do the same. Confession is good for the soul." In due time all agreed. One confessed he liked to gamble and would sneak off when away from his church. The second confessed his struggle with lust and the third one confessed to materialism. When it came to the fourth one, he wouldn't confess. The others pressed him saying, "Come now, we confessed ours. What is your secret or vice?" Finally he answered, "It is gossiping and I can hardly **wait** to get out of here."

Neither you nor I will ever be perfect until we reach heaven.

But by God's grace, there is a difference between the guy who stands before you this morning and the guy who first gave his life to Christ 50 years ago. I'm not what I ought to be, and I'm not what I'm going to be one day, but thank God I'm not what I once was. What makes the difference? When our repentance is real, it changes how we live.

Many years ago a mob boss named Mickey Cohen attended an evangelistic service wanting to know more about the Gospel. A few days later a Christian friend urged him to invite Christ into his life. He made a profession of faith, but soon afterward went right back to his criminal activities. Cohen's friend tried to correct him but Cohen was frustrated and confused. He'd heard so-and-so was a Christian cowboy, so-and-so was a Christian actress, so-and-so was a Christian senator, and he really thought he could be a Christian gangster....You didn't tell me I'd have to give up work. You never told me if I asked Jesus into my life I'd have to give up my friends. *

Cohen missed an important truth: real repentance changes your life.

God calls you and I to repent, but it must be real. A true change of mind always produces a change of action---a change that will do you good.

But it's never enough just to hear the call, and never enough to just determine to do better. We need some help if we want to truly repent and see a lasting change in our lives. Verses 15-17 tell us you need the power of the God.

It seems hard to believe people kept coming back to listen to John. He wasn't exactly a soothing voice of comfort. Yet they couldn't seem to get enough of all this talk of repentance. In fact, in verse 15 they start wondering that maybe John is the Messiah we've been looking for!

But John says you've marked the wrong man. There is One coming after me, Who is so much greater than I am, I'm not worthy to take off His shoes. He's the Main Attraction. When you repent now, I baptize you in water; but when He comes, He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire. What does this mean?

Being baptized in the Spirit is a hot button issue for many Christians, but it's really not that hard to understand. Basically, it is another way of describing conversion to Christ. When you get saved the Bible says you are baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:13 says...**For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.**

The Bible says that when you are born again, you are baptized and permanently present with the Holy Spirit of God. Imagine a sponge which is submerged (baptized) into water. What happens to the sponge? It fills up with the water it is submerged in. In the same way, when you commit your life to Christ, you are submerged into the Spirit, and also filled with the Spirit.

What does this have to do with repentance? John makes the connection using the symbol of fire. In verse 17, he says the wheat (those who repent/are baptized in the Spirit) will be gathered in the barn, while the chaff (those who refuse to repent/who are not baptized in the Spirit) will be burned with unquenchable fire.

In the context of these verses, John is connecting repentance with the power of the Holy Spirit. He is saying that if you want to truly repent, you need the Holy Spirit to help you. How does He help us?

By convicting us of sin.

John 16:8 reads... **And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:**

By regenerating us through faith in Christ.

Titus 3:5 says... **not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, by progressively working in us to make us more like Jesus.**

Then in Galatians 5:16... **I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.**

The Bible makes it clear without the power of the Holy Spirit, you cannot truly change.

Phillipians 2:12-13 12 reads...**work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.**

Right now I want to ask,---do we need to make some changes that will do us good? The Holy Spirit will give us all the help we need. It's our move now: will we hear God's call to repent? Will we make the choice to pursue a real change in our lives?

In Charles Schultz's "Peanuts" comic strip, Lucy says if she was in charge she'd change everything. Charlie Brown says, "That wouldn't be easy. Where would you start?" Lucy looks directly at him, and without hesitation, points her finger at him and says, "I'd start with you!"

That's not where you and I need to start this morning. We need to begin within ourselves.

I want to ask you right now to prepare yourself for some changes that will do you good.

First ask the Lord to speak to us about what area He wants to change in us right now. Perhaps we need to begin by coming to Christ and being saved. Or maybe there is some issue that God's been dealing with us about over and over, but we've been trying to ignore His voice. Today is the day to get serious about changing. Don't settle for a cosmetic covering---lets make up our minds to do whatever it takes to make that change real.

I am a huge Elton John fan, and as I was reflecting on this message in its early stages, two lines in the lyrics of his song, Honky Cat, kept running through my head....the lines are...

**But I quit those days and my redneck ways
And, ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh, oh, change is gonna do me good**

Ask the Lord for help. He really wants to help us become a better people, people who are like our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Will you come today and experience a change that will do you good?

Thanks be to God, AMEN