

Title: A Baptism of Repentance for the Forgiveness of Sins

Key verses:

Mark 1:4-5 – John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. (ESV)

Luke 24:45-47 – Then he [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (ESV)

Good morning, everyone. It’s good to see you all here today. Two weeks while I was listening to the sermon by Pastor Sam, I heard him speak on the themes of repentance and faith and the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. This reminded me of one of my favorite passages of Scripture, which is a nice, neat encapsulation of the gospel message. This is the version of the Great Commission as recorded in the Gospel of Luke, and this is what I would like to share with you today.

Most of us are familiar with the Great Commission as stated by Matthew: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I [Jesus Christ] have commanded you...” (Mt. 28:19-20a, ESV).

But have you ever taken a close look at the Great Commission as recorded by Luke? What did Luke focus on when he recorded the final words of Jesus to His disciples? Here is what Luke wrote at the conclusion of his gospel: “Then he [Jesus] opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem’” (Luke 24:45-47, ESV).

First, Luke tells us that Jesus had to open the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures. If you recall, the disciples – and other people of that time – often misunderstood Jesus because they were expecting a different kind of Messiah, a political messiah that would free them from domination by the Roman Empire (Isaiah 9:6-7, Micah 5:2, etc). They didn’t understand that what man needs first is to be prepared spiritually for the Messiah by His sacrifice on the cross for our sins (Matthew 1:21, John 1:29, etc).

The second thing that Jesus tells the disciples is that “*It is written*” – in the Old Testament scriptures – *that the coming Messiah must suffer* (Isaiah 53, etc). He will suffer. For our sins. He will die. And then He will be raised from the dead on the third day (Psalm 16:10, Hosea 6:2, etc).

And next ... Luke records Christ’s commission to the disciples: “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in [Jesus Christ’s] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Both Matthew and Luke say that this message is for *all nations*. When Matthew gave us Christ’s Great Commission, he focused on the fundamental activity of missionary work: that we are to make disciples and teach them Christ’s commandments. Luke focused on something else – he gave us the fundamental content of the gospel message: a message of repentance ... and forgiveness of sins. This is what I want to discuss today.

The title of today's sermon is "A Baptism of Repentance for the Forgiveness of Sins." While I was composing the introduction of today's message, I took a close look at Luke's account and I noticed that the word "baptism" isn't mentioned. Matthew mentions baptism – it is a part of making disciples – but it's not here in Luke 24.

Actually, the phrase I'm using for my title is taken from the very beginning of the gospel story, where there is a description of the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, the one who came to prepare the way for the Messiah. Luke 3:3 says, "And he [John the Baptist] went into all the region around the Jordan [river], proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (ESV).

Let's take a look at the opening words of the Gospel of Mark: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, ³the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mk. 1:1-5 (ESV), *cf.* Mal. 3:1, Is. 40:3).

This is what was happening at the beginning of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ: John, the forerunner, in accordance with Old Testament prophesy, prepared the way for the Messiah. People came from all over, confessing their sins and being baptized. Here we have the words I wish to focus on today: baptism, repentance, confession of sins, forgiveness of sins.

Part I: Sin

Romans 3:23 – "For all [of us] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (ESV).

Isaiah 59:2 – "But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear" (ESV).

What is sin? The most common Greek word in the Bible for "sin" is *hamartia*. It basically means "to miss the mark," i.e. you have missed the right target (...perhaps because you were aiming for the wrong target). We have all fallen short of God's righteous standard.

Romans 7:24 – "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (ESV) Many of us know that we are sinners and we know that we need deliverance.

Part II: Confession and Forgiveness of Sins

You know the most famous verse in the Bible ... John 3:16. How about the second most famous, or the second most important? When I was a child, the verse given to me as of next importance after John 3:16 was 1st John 1:9 – "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (ESV).

Let's take a look at the broader context of this verse. 1st John 1:5~7 says, "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (ESV).

“...The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

God is light, and if we claim to be Christians, we must walk in the light and not in the darkness of sin.

“...The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

1st John chapter 2, verses 1 and 2 – “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ²He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (ESV).

We confess our sins and we put our faith in Christ, who is advocating on our behalf with God the Father. Christ is the sacrifice for sins, the propitiation for our sins. The word “propitiation” means “appeasement” or “satisfaction” or “conciliation.” Christ’s death on the cross paid the penalty for our sin – due to our sin, we were *in debt* to our Creator, but Christ’s sacrifice *satisfied that debt*, paid that debt.

1st Peter 2:24-25 – “And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. ²⁵For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (NASB).

What God the Father desires for us is that we live in righteousness, but we have strayed from that path and fallen into sin. To accomplish God’s desire that mankind walk in righteousness, Christ took on human flesh and became a sacrifice to redeem human flesh, to redeem mankind, to redeem you and me.

2nd Corinthians 5:20b~21 – “...We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (NASB).

This is the message we have for the world: that we are each sinners, that Christ has paid the penalty for sin by His sacrifice on the cross, that we can be reconciled to God and be cleansed of our sin. God wants to be reconciled with us – He wants us to “return to the Shepherd and Guardian of [our] souls.” That’s means repentance.

Part III: Repentance

This is a crucial topic, and it is the main thing I want to speak on today.

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia* – it literally means “after one’s mind” or “thinking differently afterward,” so it basically means to change one’s mind about something. Changing one’s mind usually leads to a change in one’s direction in life. In Christian terms, it means to change one’s mind in regards to sin, in regards to our rebellious attitude toward our Creator. This is the essence of repentance: a change of mind regarding sin and a reorientation to God. Flowing from this we normally would find the fruits of repentance: a change of behavior. We turn away from sin and we turn to God.

In Hebrew, two words are used for repentance: *shuv* (meaning “to return”) and *nachan* (meaning “to feel sorrow”). Here are the two aspects we associate with repentance: a sense of sorrow for our sin (often called penitence) and a turning around of our mind. Leading to a new manner of life.

When I think of these things, I can't help recalling the story of King David and his sin with Bathsheba. She was another man's wife, but David wanted her and then he plotted to have her husband killed in battle. When the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin, David admitted that he had done wrong, that he had sinned – he felt great sorrow and he repented. After that, he composed Psalm 51 – here are some portions of that psalm (ESV):

- ¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!
³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
^{4a}Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,
⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Verse 17 – “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Here we see the essence of repentance: a broken and contrite heart.

Verse 4a – “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.” Here we see confession of sins.

Verse 7 – “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” (Also verse 9). Here is forgiveness ... cleansing.

Verse 10 – “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” Here we see a renewed life.

Verse 13 – “Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.” This is very interesting. After David repents and returns to God, he is in a position to tell other sinners the ways of God and how to be made right with God, how to repent and turn back to God. Each of us, too, have a testimony we can share with others on how we were reconciled with our Creator and how our friends can do the same.

A few minutes ago, I quoted the Apostle Paul's plea in 2nd Corinthians: “We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20b, NASB).

Let's look at some of the earlier verses in that letter. 2nd Corinthians 5:18-20a – “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us...” (ESV).

Through Christ, God is reconciling the world to Himself. And we, the followers of Christ, have been given the “ministry of reconciliation,” to proclaim this “message of reconciliation” to the world. We are ambassadors for Christ, God working through us to reach the world. Each of us should be involved in this task in one way or another. This is what Paul is saying here, and he is echoing Christ's final commission to His disciples, that repentance and forgiveness of sins be proclaimed in His name throughout the world, that sinners be reconciled to God, that sinners turn from their sins and turn to God.

In Acts 20:21 the Apostle Paul is described as “... testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (ESV).

Part IV: Repentance and Faith

Protestants and evangelicals like to say that salvation is by “Faith Alone.” What role, then, does repentance have in our salvation? I have sometimes heard preachers stress “Faith Alone” so much that they downplay repentance as a necessary ingredient of Christian conversion. But as we see in Acts 20:21 and in Luke’s version of the Great Commission, repentance is a vital part of the gospel message.

Next, I have two quotes for you from the ESV Study Bible on the relationship of faith and repentance. The first quote comes from one of the introductory theological articles in this Study Bible, from an article on Salvation.

The fundamental response demanded by God is faith and repentance (see note on Acts 2:38). The call to faith and repentance is evident in the ministry of John the Baptist, in Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom (Mark 1:15), in the speeches in Acts, in the Pauline letters, and throughout the NT. ... Indeed, the whole of the NT can be understood as a call to repentance and faith (cf. Hebrews 11).

This quote tells us to look at the study note on Acts 2:38. So, if we turn the page to that verse, here are the comments we find there:

The gospel can be summarized in different ways. Sometimes faith alone is named as the one thing necessary for salvation (see John 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9; Eph. 2:8–9), other times repentance alone is named (Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:10), and sometimes both are named (Acts 20:21). Genuine faith always involves repentance, and vice versa. Repentance includes a change of mind that ends up trusting God (i.e., having faith).

[Acts 20:21 – “testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”]

Sometimes faith is the one thing named as necessary for salvation. Sometimes, repentance is the one thing named. Sometimes, both are named. Both are crucial. I like the way this study note puts it.

Part V: Repent and be Baptized

A few minutes ago, I read you the study note on Acts 2:38 in my Study Bible. That verse comes during Peter’s great sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The people are convicted of their sin and they ask in verse 37, “Brothers, what shall we do?” In response Peter says in verse 38, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (ESV).

Here we see my topic words for today’s message: repentance, forgiveness of sins, and baptism. In the ministry of John the Baptist, of Jesus Christ, and in the book of Acts, we see baptism following after repentance, confession of sins, and faith in the gospel. In the act of baptism, we put the Christian convert under the water and then up out of the water. This is a wonderful picture of the death of our old life and then we are raised to a new life. This mirrors the death and resurrection of Christ. (That picture I have on the screen is a nice picture showing the parallel of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection with our own repentance, baptism, and new life in Christ.)

Part VI: The Fruits of Repentance

This is the last section of my sermon today. I want to share with you a few stories from the Scripture to show you what repentance looks like. Actually, I already shared with you one picture: the story of King David. Now, I’d like to look at some more stories – these coming from the New Testament.

When John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness, people came from all over to confess their sins and be baptized. He exhorted them to “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance...” (Luke 3:8a, ESV). When the people asked for guidance on doing so, this is how he replied:

¹⁰And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” ¹¹And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” ¹²Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” ¹³And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” ¹⁴Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.” (Luke 3:10-14, ESV).

Here we see examples of basic changes John expected the people to make after they have made the decision to repent and turn their lives around. They share food and clothing with people in need. They don’t abuse their position and cheat others financially. They don’t make threats and false accusations. Soldiers especially should be content with the fair wage they have been given and not try to gain more by threats or intimidation.

John had a strong rebuke for the Pharisees and religious leaders who came out to see him. Matthew chapter 3:

⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (Matthew 3:7-9, ESV).

John knew these men’s hearts. It isn’t enough to come to hear the preacher. It isn’t enough to present oneself for baptism. You cannot trust in your pedigree, the religious heritage you were raised in. You must “bear the fruit of repentance.” A change of heart and a change in orientation, leading to a new life.

When I think of a story of a changed heart leading to bearing good fruit and to making right something you have done wrong, the example that comes to mind is that of Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Although the word *repentance* does not appear in his story, we can clearly see its fruit.

He [Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through. ²And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷And when the people saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” ⁸And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” ⁹And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:1-10, ESV).

I wonder why this man was so eager to see Jesus. Evidently, he knew the message Jesus was preaching, and he knew he needed what Jesus had. Then, Jesus reached out to him and accepted him totally by ... telling Zacchaeus that He’s going to be staying at his home tonight. Zacchaeus responded to this gracious acceptance with fruits of repentance. He promised to give half his wealth to the poor and to restore whatever money he had cheated people of – in fact, to pay back four times as much! This promise, of course, came from his heart – that’s where repentance comes from. Following after this are the fruits of repentance.

I’d like to tell you one more story before I close. This is the story of the woman at the well in John chapter 4. Again, the word *repentance* does not appear in the story, but it surely must have been part of what happened to her that day.

Jesus was sitting alone at a well in Samaria when a woman came to draw water. Jesus started a conversation with her and they talked about “living water” and “true worship.” When He asked her to call her husband, she said that she didn’t have one, and He indicated to her that He knew very well that she had had four husbands and that the man she was living with now was not her husband. She realized that Jesus was a prophet. She then mentioned the coming Messiah . . . and He told her that He was this Messiah. She excitedly went back to the town to tell people. John 4:28-30 (ESV):

So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹“Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” ³⁰They went out of the town and were coming to him.

Then verses 39-42:

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his word. ⁴²They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

Earlier in today’s message, I quoted from Psalm 51, when King David repented from his sin:

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

We see this same scenario in the woman at the well. She meets the Savior, she recognizes her sin, she goes to tell other sinners, then they come and hear from the Savior as well and they come to trust in Him.

We all have a testimony of how we met our Savior. We can tell others of our experience. The Apostle Paul says we have the “ministry of reconciliation.” Let us be sure to share our experience with others.

Today’s message has been about repentance. Have you repented? Have you recognized your sin – against others and against your Creator?

Have you met the Savior and are you ready to be baptized?

Do you want to “bear the fruits of repentance”?

Remember, we have the “Lift” sign in the back of the auditorium. After the service, people will be there ready to help you and pray for you for any need that you have.

God bless you all. That is all for today’s message. Let’s pray.