

TRUE REPENTANCE

A SERMON

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“Repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” Acts 3:19

THERE are various kinds of repentances spoken of in the word of God. There is the repentance of desperation. Cain repented with this kind of repentance, but his repentance did not bring him to God, but led him out from the presence of the Lord. “From your face shall I be hid.” So, Esau also repented with the repentance of desperation, and it led him to try to destroy his brother Jacob; he made up his mind to be a murderer. That is the repentance of desperation. Ahithophel also had this kind of repentance. When he saw that his counsel against David was not followed, and saw that David was sure ultimately to prevail, he repented, went and hanged himself. And this kind of repentance was the repentance of Judas, when he saw what would follow; he repented, and went and hanged himself. So, this repentance of desperation is a dreadful thing. This is one of the repentances spoken of in the word of God, and I am sure the Lord never exhorts people to this kind of repentance. Then, secondly, there is the repentance of reformation; such as was brought about by the preaching of Jonah at Nineveh, and such as was brought about in the mind of king Ahab when Elijah reproved him; he humbled himself, and the Lord deferred the judgment. And so many more instances we might name of this. Indeed, the repentance of reformation is one of the privileges of men, for when a man repents with the repentance of reformation, God accepts it of that man as the homage of the creature, and will favor that man according to the repentance wherewith he has repented. But we must not call that religion; we must not call that grace; we must not call that that repentance that is spoken of in our text. See how the Lord favored Ahab, and see how the Lord favored the Ninevites. And if the Savior's miracles had been wrought in the ancient cities of the plain, they would have repented with the repentance of reformation. And if the Jews had done as they were exhorted in the onset of John's ministry, and in the onset of the Savior's ministry, for they both commenced their ministry thus, “Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;” if they had repented with this repentance of reformation, why, their city and their land might have remained unto this day. But they did not repent, but rather went on further and further,

waxing worse and worse, until they completed their murderous enmity and their sin in doing as they did. But then there is another repentance, a repentance which the Lord alone can give. Hence

Jesus Christ is “exalted a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins.” And the persons who in our text are exhorted to repent and be converted are regenerated persons. Our text does not exhort unregenerate men to repent, because the repentance spoken of is connected with conversion, and with remission of sin, and with the approving and refreshing presence of the Lord, and the person here exhorted are already regenerated. The apostle Paul, in his address to the Athenians, says, alluding to the superstitions by which people were deluded, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” Acts 17:30. But then what kind of a commandment is that? That is the question. Notice, it is put in the present tense, “commands.” How did he command Saul of Tarsus to repent? Why, say you, effectually. So, he does now. “All men,” all nations, all classes of men; where he sends the command into the soul the work is done. That command is a self-acting command, a self-sufficient command. “The dead shall hear,” which is the same thing in substance, though the words are different. “The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and live.” John 5:25. And did the Savior ever say to one man, “Follow me,” and that man did not follow? Certainly not. It mattered not whether they were fishing in the sea, sitting at the receipt of custom, or in the sycamore tree; wherever they were, when the great command came by his eternal deity, though only his manhood was seen, and human voice heard, deity was in it, “Follow me;” the soul came from death to life, the man was turned towards the Savior, became a follower of him, and every one such is now in heaven. The commanding all men there is simply all classes of men, all orders of men, and all nations of men; and where he gives the command the work is done.

First, then, I have to point out *the character thus exhorted*. Secondly *the meaning of the repentance and conversion here spoken of*. Thirdly, *the great purpose*, “that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

First, then, *the character thus exhorted*. Now in this chapter we have an account of the lame man being healed, which miracle drew the attention of the people to the apostle Peter. Peter then addresses the people in a way I shall carefully notice, because what he says to them is very interesting, and belongs to us. And that discourse was the means of bringing their souls into life, and as soon as ever the apostle Peter saw that their souls were brought into spiritual life, that they were quickened; he immediately changed his tone of address, and spoke to them in accordance with the life that was now in their souls. Now his address was this; first, you find the apostle Peter put in his address God, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Jesus Christ together. This would be wonderfully convincing to the Jews, where, of course, the Lord was pleased to open their eyes. Why, the Jew would say to himself, is Jesus Christ one with, Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob? Did Abraham know anything of Jesus Christ? And is it a truth that this Jesus Christ is God's Son? Why, then we are not Abraham's children; why, then, after all, we shall not go to heaven, where Abraham is, and where Isaac and Jacob are. What! had these patriarchs anything to do with this person we have crucified? Was this God's own Son? Why, this cuts us off altogether; this confuses and seems to condemn us altogether. What! did Abraham see his day? He did. Did Isaac see the Savior's day? He did; for Isaac himself was a child of promise, and Isaac was taught to know that: that promise was to be confirmed and carried out by a substitute; and Isaac had had an experience in his life that would enlighten his mind upon this, for he was bound hand and foot, and even laid

upon the wood, and the knife was ready to slay him. He had asked his father, "Where is the lamb?" and now the Lord made a provision, providing a substitute for Isaac, and Isaac was set free. He would then see that this pointed to the great substitute, Christ Jesus. Jacob would see the mystic ladder, which is Christ Jesus. Now the Jews who listened to Peter would say, Why, this condemns us altogether, because we know that God was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and if they looked to this person for salvation, and we have crucified him, then to all intents and purposes we are lost. If this person be the Son of God, then what an awful crime we have committed! what an awful state we are in! Now this darted into the minds of those where the Lord was pleased to direct the arrow for, he directs the arrows: "Your arrows are sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies;" Psalm 45:5, and this would have a tendency to enlighten them.

Then the second thing in Peter's address was a contrast between them and God, a further contrast. Already here is a contrast, and contrasts are very instructive. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob looked to this person for salvation, and you crucified him. It is God's own Son that you have dealt with as though he were a malefactor. "You denied the Holy One and the Just." How would that again have a tendency to convince them! Of course, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would not look for eternal salvation by one that was not holy and was not just. Now, says Peter, "You denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of life." Have we done that? What we must have been! how Satanized we must have been! what a state we are in! It would all have a tendency to convince them of this. Then comes another point, Whom God has raised from the dead. Is that true? Has God raised him from the dead? Oh, then, what must be the slumbering elements of his almighty wrath against such blind wretches as we are! We crucified him in the most ignominious way, and thought we had put an end to him. What! has God raised him from the dead? If that be true, and we have done this great crime, surely the lowest hell will be our destiny, and wrath the most tremendous must come upon such wretches as we are, vile as we are. Have we done this? But while I thus speak of them, let us not forget that we are no better by nature than they were. Do not let us meet here to talk of the ancients as though they were such enormous sinners in comparison with ourselves but let us take them in their worst condition as a picture of our own heart, of our own nature, and of our own state; and while we dwell upon their convictions let us bless God that we have a corresponding conviction of our sinner-ship, and that we prize his mercy so richly manifested unto us. Go a little farther. Now you know that man was lame from his birth. Yes; everybody knows it, for he used to sit at the gate of the temple called Beautiful; everybody knows it, we cannot deny it. Now there he is; look at him. Yes; we have seen him walking, leaping, skipping about. Well, now, be it known unto you that it is in the name of this very Jesus Christ whom you have crucified, in the name of this very gospel that you have put from you, that this man stands before you whole. It darted conviction into their minds, and Peter saw that they were alive from the dead and turns around and begins to sympathize: "And now, brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he has so fulfilled." I thus take it that these persons were brought into spiritual life, and now they are exhorted to repent and be converted. I know what you will say. You will say, Well, I do not see that you have proved that they were born of God; I do not see that you have proved that they were quickened from the dead, and as you have not proved that, you have not proved that they were not dead sinners exhorted to repent with a saving repentance. Very well. Now go to the last two verses of this chapter and hear the definition there that puts the matter beyond all dispute: "You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto

Abraham” God made two covenants with Abraham, and these are the children of the covenant, mark that, “the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with Abraham.” Now in the 7th verse of the 12th of Genesis we read that the Lord made a temporal covenant with Abraham: “And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto your seed will I give this land and there built he an altar unto the Lord.” Is that the covenant because, if so, all Jews were the children of that covenant; and that the Jews knew, boasted of, rested in, and there they stopped. But notice, just take notice of it, and you that love the truth, and glory in knowing it, see how particular the apostle Peter is. He points us, not to the 7th verse of the 12th of Genesis, but to the 3rd verse of the 12th of Genesis. He points us, not to the temporal covenant, that God gave the Jews a particular land, but he points us to another covenant, saying unto Abraham, “In your seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” Come to the, New Testament; see Peter bringing in the Gentiles at Caesarea; see the apostles preaching unto the ends of the earth. You are the children of this spiritual covenant, this eternal covenant, this everlasting covenant, sealed by the blood that you have shed, sealed by the Testator of this covenant, now risen from the dead; you are the children of that same covenant. Is not this a proof that they were alive from the dead, or else he could not have pronounced them to be the children of the new covenant? Dr. Pusey tells us, in a letter recently, that he has never refused absolution to anyone. Does Dr. Pusey pronounce absolution in this way when he sees a soul is brought into the new covenant, that covenant ordered in all things and sure, and that that soul thereby gives evidence of its being born of God? Is it on this ground that the Doctor pronounces absolution? If so, I will join with him. But I do not think it is. I do not much think the Doctor knows anything of this covenant. I do not think so. But every man will be damned that does not, for there is no salvation out of the new covenant; there is no salvation apart from the blood of the everlasting covenant. “This is my blood of the new covenant.”

Here, then, these persons were alive from the dead, and their solemn inquiry, though not recorded, fairly implied the same inquiry that is recorded in the preceding chapter, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Why, “repent you therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;” “Unto you first”, that is another proof, “God, having raised up his Son Jesus”, Christ was not raised from the dead unto any but his own; he was not seen by a soul after his resurrection but by his own disciples. “Unto you” he is your resurrection, he died for your sins, he is risen as your resurrection, “unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you.” How do you know that, Peter? Why, because they are convinced of the emptiness of the old covenant; they are convinced of that; they are convinced now of the truth; they are led into the new covenant. If God had intended their destruction, they would never have been thus awakened and thus concerned. Therefore, he “sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” Now, mark, watch me narrowly, “in turning away every one of you.” Ah, what, “everyone”? Every one that was convinced of his sin, every one that was convinced of the iniquitous system by which, they had crucified the Savior. Now just compare that scripture; with two more, “to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” Now take the 21st verse of the 1st chapter of Matthew: “You shall call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.” So, then, if they had not been his people they would not have been convinced by Peter's discourse or by any other means; they would not have been thus brought into the new covenant. Then take another scripture, 11th of Romans: “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, there shall come,” take notice of this, unto Israel, “out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.” How did God take our sins

away? By imputing them to his dear Son. And how did Jesus Christ take them away? By the sacrifice of himself. And how did the Holy Ghost take them away? By bringing in Jesus Christ to our souls and giving us the victory through the blood of the Lamb and enabling us to sing as we pass through this valley of tears, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses from all sin." Where is your duty-faith here? See, then, how clear it is that these persons were, when the apostle thus exhorted them, alive from the dead; stood before him as the children of the new covenant, stood before him as the children of the resurrection, stood before him as the blessed of the Lord. He might have cursed you, but he has said he will bless you, for you are a part of his people, "in turning away every one of you from his iniquities." I will not say anything harsh or hasty if I can help it, because these are very solemn matters, but I do believe that the doctrine of exhorting the natural man to spiritual acts, the doctrine of general invitation and general exhortation, as though it were either the duty or in the power of a sinner, dead in sin, to do anything spiritual, I do believe that such a doctrine has a great tendency to deceive the souls of men; and I do think such a doctrine is a very irreverent doctrine; I think it is a doctrine that dishonors the counsels of God the Father, as though his counsels were so lax that they would not secure the ingathering of the objects of his love. I think also such a doctrine dishonors the Lord Jesus Christ, who has said, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring." John 10:16. I also think that the doctrine of general exhortation to dead men to perform spiritual acts is a sin against the Holy Ghost, that blows where he pleases, takes up the isles as a very little thing, and gives to every man severally as he will. And I think such a doctrine also has a tendency to rob us of the liberty we have in Christ, bring us into bondage, and make us put confidence in human effort, instead of our faith standing in the wisdom and everlasting love of the great God. And therefore, if we feel what we ought to feel gratitude to God, we shall contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. And what was that faith? Why, a faith that made it all of grace, and the promise sure unto all the seed. Much more could I say upon what I believe to be the evil of that doctrine. Instead of putting our poor fellow-creatures off with the notion that they can repent, and that they can cast themselves upon Christ, they can come to Christ, let us preach that repentance that is essential to salvation. Let us insist upon the evidences of being born of God; let us insist upon the fruits of that repentance which Christ is exalted a Prince and a Savior to give; and then, when the sinner sees himself destitute of all this, he is alarmed begins to seek God in earnest. But all the time you put men off with a duty-faith and a duty-repentance, they settle down in death's dark shade, hate God's truth; they have no doubts, no fears, no misgivings, how should they, for they are dead in sin; there is no groaning, being burdened. Not so the real Christian. There is a mighty difference in his character; he has undergone a wonderful revolution, become a new creature, a new man.

Secondly, I notice *the meaning of the repentance and conversion here spoken of*. You that are thus awakened to see this, you want to know what you shall do. Well, "repent." I should question whether the word "repent" would convey precisely the same idea to them that it does to us. Parkhurst defines the Greek word in this twofold way: First, to think after; that is, to think the matter over. Second, that it means change from the position you had before. Now, then, they were to repent; they were to change from what they were before. Let us look at it. First, ignorance. See how unacquainted you were with Jesus Christ. Yes, we were. See how unacquainted you were with the new covenant. Yes, we were. See how unacquainted you were with resurrection; see how unacquainted you were with God's way of blessing you. Yes, we were. But now, by Jesus Christ having put your sin away, and by receiving Jesus Christ, that turns you from your sins, and turns your sins from you; makes you,

“One with Jesus, by eternal union one:”

Now you come away from that which you did know, come away from those doctrines, repent of your ignorance, and come to where knowledge is. Where is knowledge? In Christ; for in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. No, Peter might have said, and perhaps did say, for it is only a small sample of what he did say recorded, he might have said, Jesus himself says, “Come unto me, all you that labor 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 you shall find rest unto your souls.” Matthew 11:28,29. Do not go back to these beggarly elements again, Repent, change from them. So, we do. You want to know what you are to do. You did not think you would be received. No, we did not. Oh, we are glad we may look to the Lord; we are glad we may expect mercy; we are glad there is a sufficiency of grace to save us, and we are glad that with him there is plenteous redemption and plenteous mercy. Second, their enmity. See how deadly their enmity was. Now do not go back there again. You want to know what you are to do. Satan will tell you, Ah! it is too late to look to God now; it is too late to look to Jesus Christ now. If you had looked before you committed this dreadful sin, and that dreadful sin, and the other dreadful sin, it would have been all very well; but it is too late now. But, as though Peter should say, do not repent as though it were the repentance of desperation; but come from your enmity, and look to him. He loves you, he has chosen you, he has redeemed you, and, though you do not understand it yet, he has called you, and you are alive from the dead. Therefore, repent of your ignorance and of your enmity; that is, turn away from it. For all repentances are practical. The desperate repentance is practical, the repentance of reformation is practical, and I am sure the repentance which the Lord gives from his eternal throne is practical. Was it not practical with Saul of Tarsus? How he turned away from his former ignorance, his unbelief, and his enmity! And now turn to that gospel that shall make you wise unto salvation; turn to that gospel that shall overcome your unbelief and nourish your faith; turn to that gospel which will slay your enmity, shed abroad God's love in your hearts, and make you a happy, happy people. Here, then, Jesus Christ showed in this case, as he does in all cases where salvation is, that he is exalted a Prince and a Savior to give repentance to Israel. Let us ask, for a moment, how is it with us that are here this morning? Have we been brought to know Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob spiritually, or as they stood in an eternal covenant? Are we brought to see what the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are? and are we the children of the prophets, the prophets being our paternal teachers, that we love them in the spiritual testimonies they bear of God's eternal mercy? If so, then is fulfilled in us, that promise of the Lord to Christ, and from him to the apostles, and from them to all the people of God down to the end of time, As for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord; “My spirit that is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth;” nor did they; the Savior retained the truth to the end “nor out of the mouth of your seed”, the apostles; nor did they, “nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed.” Bless the Lord, these truths have been in my mouth now for forty-two years; they have not departed and they never will; I love them more and more every day; and yet, presently, when I come to die, I shall cross the Jordan in a holy; heavenly, glorious triumph, by the testimony of the gospel, and shall enter heaven with the testimonies of the gospel, and to all eternity shall glorify the Lord in the language of the testimonies of the gospel; for it is an everlasting gospel. The gospel that has come to earth will go to heaven. As the same Jesus Christ that came from heaven to earth went from earth to heaven, as the same Jesus Christ that lived and

died on earth reigns forever in heaven, so the same gospel that has made us acquainted with him here will be the language, only in perfection, when time itself shall be no more.

Again, "be converted." To be converted means to be conformed. Repentance means a change from the former ignorance, unbelief, and enmity, into knowledge, faith, and love. Conversion means conformity. To be converted means to be conformed to the new state of things. "Be you conformed unto him." This is what they desire, to be conformed unto him. Why, the Lord's people are converted a great many times during their lifetime, because to be converted means to be conformed. You are every day more or less deformed, and then when the Lord renews you again, that conforms you. When Peter denied the Lord, he was deformed; and the Savior said, "When you are converted", that is, conformed from this deformity, "strengthen your brethren." You will do very well for that now, because you will strengthen them in the right way. Now that you have denied me you have had a pretty good proof that there is no strength in the creature; so that if you strengthen them now, you will strengthen them in the right sort of thing, and in the right way. "When you are converted, strengthen your brethren." Why, Peter had been converted long before that; and therefore, the conversion there means a renewed conformity to God's order. Now this conformity is to be by faith. Receive Jesus Christ as your life, as your light, as your sanctification, as your righteousness, as your redemption, as your all and in all. There is many a regenerated man that has not yet fully repudiated or changed from his former state. Many a regenerated man is not yet complete in his conversion, not yet completely conformed to God's own order of things.

We notice now the great purpose, "that your sins may be blotted out;" that is, I apprehend, in their consciences. Now if you will look to this, you will see a great importance in it. In order for your sins to be blotted out, there must be a conformity to God's own way of blotting them out. You must be humbled enough to make you feel that the law is spiritual, and you are carnal, sold under sin, and that if ever your sins be forgiven, it must be entirely for his name's sake, it must be entirely through the blood of Christ, it must be entirely by God's good pleasure, it must be entirely by the freeness of his mercy and of his grace. Then he says, "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and will not remember your sins." Isaiah 43:25. These people were now prepared for this. See how the Lord prepared Isaiah to receive forgiveness; see his 6th chapter. See how the Lord prepared Joshua the high priest to receive forgiveness. See how the Lord prepared the publican to receive forgiveness. See how the Lord prepared Saul of Tarsus to receive forgiveness. See how the Lord prepared the people on the day of Pentecost to receive forgiveness. And see how he prepared you. I know he prepared me. I shall never forget the wormwood and the gall. God alone knows what I for months suffered from my guilt and sin, the threatening's of the Bible, the wrath of God. His wrath indeed lay hard upon me. I thought, of all the demons in hell there was not one so vile as I was. But I did not know that he was preparing to blot out my transgressions. By-and-bye the Savior's blood is sprinkled, the truth comes with power; peace, life, light, liberty, joy, and full assurance of interest in eternal things flowed into my soul; my peace became as a river, and Christ's righteousness to me like the waves of the sea, rolling in wave after wave, promise after promise, blessing after blessing; and now within a few weeks of forty years I have preached in the strength of what the Lord gave me then; "Tarry in Jerusalem, until you be endued with power from on high." Religion is a personal, a divine, a vital, an incorruptible, an eternal reality. As soon could the Savior fall from his throne as one of his sheep ever lost. There is a stability about it. "He that has begun the good work in you will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:6. His dealings will humble you, and make you feel what a

poor creature you are and of yourself. As the Christian goes on, he sinks in his own estimation day by day; while the Savior rises, the truth rises, and Christ is the Christian's path; Christ is the path that shines more and more unto the perfect day.

But lastly, we have in our text a note of time, or times, "When the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Before I notice the note of time, I will just make an observation here upon the presence of the Lord. The idea is this to my mind. God in the first Adam, the fall, has forsaken you; he has hidden his face from you, and you are there consumed because of your iniquities. God in the broken covenant, the Jewish nation, has hid his face from you; you know not the things that belong to your peace, your national peace; they are hid from your eyes. God has left you, given you up to the wild beasts and birds of prey, the Roman armies and others; "where the carcass is, there will the eagles, "the birds of prey be gathered together," and carry on that work that shall terminate in your destruction as a nation. But now, by Christ Jesus, here, by Christ Jesus, he smiles upon you, dwells with you, and will never hide his face from you again, as, in the first Adam and as in the broken covenant. Here, in Christ Jesus, he will dwell with you forever. For Jesus has spoiled principalities, that is, sinful and Satanic principalities, and powers, has ascended up on high, and received gifts for men, even for the rebellious, that the Lord God might dwell among them. Now he will come and smile upon you, love you, bless you, approve you; now he will not behold iniquity in you, nor see perverseness in you; now, as you stand there, there shall be no enchantment against you, nor any divination against you; no, God is with you, the shout of a king in your midst, and all you can do is to stand and wonder, and say, "What has God wrought!" The presence of the Lord; did the Savior ever favor his disciples with his presence on the ground of anything good in them, that is, after the flesh considered? There was something good in them, because his grace was in them, and faith was in them, and his Spirit was in them. Was there nothing wrong, was there no weakness shown on their part between the time when the dear Savior was taken in the garden of Gethsemane, and the time when he rose from the dead? Yes, say you, they all forsook him and fled. But when he reappeared to them, did he reappear to them unkindly, wrathfully, retributively, were not his first words, "Peace be unto you"? Did he not breathe on them the breath of life? "Receive you the Holy Ghost." And were not the disciples glad when they saw the Lord? Oh, what a sweet revelation is this, to have our God with us, never, never, no, never to leave nor to forsake us! Here we have the presence of the Lord in a way that his presence can be had by man in no other manner. And what does the refreshing mean? Why, it means what would take me three or four hours to open up; therefore, I must just hint at it. First, it is a sabbatical term. In Deuteronomy, where Moses speaks of the Lord's, creating the world, he says, "The Lord rested on the seventh day, and was refreshed." Now Jesus Christ rested when his work was done, and not before, and is refreshed. And therefore, it means release. Our law toil is done, our law work is done, the suffering is done, all is completed, and by him we are released. And what is more refreshing than this, to be released from sin, and disease, and all tribulation?