

True Repentance And Repenting On Behalf Of Our Nations

'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus the Messiah, for the forgiveness of sins' (Acts 2:38).

'All we like sheep have gone astray. Everyone has turned to his own way. The Lord God has put on Him (Jesus) the guilt and iniquity of us all' (Isaiah 53:6).

'He personally bore our iniquities in His own body on the cross so we may die to sin and live in righteousness ... for we were going astray like sheep, but now we have returned to the Shepherd and the Guardian of our souls' (1 Peter 2:24 & 25).

'All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23).

'Repent and turn again so your sins may be blotted out, so there may come times of refreshing in the presence of the Lord, then He may send Jesus Who was ordained for you before Whom heaven must receive (and retain) until the times of restoration of all things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of His holy prophets' (Acts 3:19 to 21).

How does repentance affect people all over the world today? If we do not fully understand the word 'repent', then we cannot form the close and lasting relationship that God requires of us. Without repentance there can be no forgiveness. Without forgiveness there can be no spiritual growth or cleansing of our sin. There is much misunderstanding about what repentance really is. Repentance is not a ritual of the church nor is it an emotion. Repentance means to completely turn around, to change our minds, to decide to turn away from all unrighteousness and sin. It is a decision of the will that is registered in the mind. It is a choice to submit ourselves to what God requires us to do. We have all sinned and we were all going the wrong way, and to get back to God we need to turn around and face His direction and walk towards Him. To show we genuinely have a repentant attitude, we need to humble ourselves before the Lord and apologise to Him for offending Him. True repentance usually accompanies a deep sense of shame and regret, often with many tears. If we do not genuinely regret our sin and will not apologise for our sin, we have not truly repented. We must have our hearts right before God (Acts 8:21).

We can look at repentance in an earthly way. Imagine if we did something dreadful that offended our natural father and he caught us in the act. We would feel shame and embarrassment, and would probably weep. We would regret our actions and we would apologise to our father for hurting his feelings, for disappointing him and for breaking his trust in us. We would promise not to repeat our bad deed. We would work towards restoring our father's trust in us again. The same is true in the spiritual realm. That is true repentance. The prayer of repentance encourages personal holiness. 'If we confess our sins to God, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John 1:9). If we are to live a continuously righteous life, we need to continually confess sin and be forgiven. Once we repent and are forgiven, we need to put whatever sin we have committed behind us and not think about it nor mention it again. 'One thing I do, I forget what lies behind and press forward to what lies ahead' (Philippians 3:13). Walking towards God instead of away from Him is an awe-inspiring action. It is almost frightening but with Jesus as our Shepherd and our Mediator, we can have boldness before the presence of God. 'Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God' (1 John 3:21).

The Book of Acts of the Apostles has a very real application for us today. At that time, the only covenant people God had on all the earth were the Jewish people and they related to Him in a special way. Their relationship with God the Father separated them from all other nations on earth. Only when the apostles began to preach to the Gentiles, has God had a second covenant people, and we are people who have accepted and received Jesus as our Saviour. Whatever church we attend and what ever the denomination we choose is not relevant to our relationship with God. Much of what applied to Israel in those days applies to all believers and has done since the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles. We all need to comprehend God's program for the close of this age and the purposes which He is seeking to accomplish and how they relate to us. Most of us are associated with what is known as Pentecostalism or the Charismatic renewal which is a move of God He is using to accomplish His purposes.

This particular time in history has been a special period of time that has been spoken of by all God's prophets, which makes our era of extreme interest and importance. Jesus and Paul called it 'the end of the age' (Matthew 28:20; 1 Corinthians 10:11). The end of this age is not the end of the world. From the beginning of the human race until the 'last days' Jesus spoke about, all the prophets God has had on earth, have spoken about this certain period of time that was to come in the history of the human race. The Bible gives us certain successive phases that follow in God's divine program. By coincidence, in the English

language each one of the four key words begins with the letters 'Re'. Repent, refresh, restore and return. The first thing God demanded was repentance and there would be seasons of refreshing. Then He said, out of the seasons of refreshing there would be times of restoration. Then after this period of restoration there is one tremendous event that is scheduled to take place, and that is the return of Messiah Jesus. No one but God the Father knows the hour and the day, but we need to look for the signs (Matthew 24:36) and we need to keep watch (Matthew 25:13). By implication, the children of the Light should be aware of the season preceding the return of Jesus. There is a time and season when His return can take place and it cannot take place before or after this appointed time. Heaven must receive and retain Jesus until the time of restoration of all things (regarding Israel and the church), then He will return. So we have the clear outline of successive phases related to God's people that are to mark the close of the age.

John the Baptist heralded in Jesus' ministry by calling for repentance and preparing the way for the Lord (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; Mark 1:1 to 4). Jesus could not come and accomplish all that was required unless John the Baptist prepared the way by preparing the hearts of the people, and that was done by calling for repentance. The sign they had truly repented was their spiritual fruit, then they were baptised. John's baptism was the outward evidence of repentance (Acts 13:24). It was different to the baptism we receive now, which is identifying ourselves with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3 to 5), which could not happen until Jesus had died and rose again. If people had not repented, then John refused to baptise them. He insisted they repent first and they had to bring forth spiritual fruit before they could be baptised (Matthew 3:8), and the basic requirement for baptism was repentance.

Jesus was baptised by John, although He had no need of repentance, it was for our sakes, not His (Matthew 3:13 to 17). John said he had to decrease his ministry and Jesus had to increase His (John 3:30). Once John was imprisoned, Jesus began His ministry and He also called for repentance and told people to believe the Gospel (Mark 1:14 & 15). There is a great mistake in modern preaching that says we need only believe. Jesus said we need to repent and believe. The one time Jesus said to only believe was when He was about to raise Jairus' daughter from death (Luke 8:50). It is wrong to take that situation out of context and say belief is all God requires of the sinner. Saying that is to misrepresent God because before believing, God demands repentance. Without true repentance there can never be true faith.

We need to repent while we are on earth. Once we are dead it is too late so praying for the dead is pointless. Leaving it until the last minute is toying with our eternity because there may not be time to repent. Some people who have a prolonged illness may have time to repent, but if someone suffers sudden death and they have not repented, then they are lost for eternity. It is only while we are on earth, while we have the opportunity, is the only time our repentance is accepted. Jesus made this clear when some Galileans had been murdered by Pilate and eighteen died suddenly when a tower in Siloam fell on them. Jesus said they had all been lost eternally (Luke 13:1 to 5). Jesus said unless we repent, we will all likewise perish. The only alternative to perishing is repentance. It is significant, all the sacrifices the Galileans were offering when they were killed, apparently did not save their souls because Jesus said they perished. To perish indicates a lost soul, so we could be in the middle of some religious ordinance, going to church or even praying, and if God requires our soul and we have not repented then we will perish. Repentance is serious business with our Father.

After Jesus had been resurrected, He commissioned all the disciples to go into the entire world and teach people to repent, then be baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit. It was necessary for the Messiah to die and be the first to rise from the dead, then in His name, repentance and remission of sin should be preached amongst all nations beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:46 & 47). The first offer in the Gospel is not forgiveness, but repentance. There is repentance then forgiveness of sin. In the Book of Revelation, we have messages sent from the Lord Himself to seven Christian churches. God found no fault with the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia but the other five churches had to repent. Jesus said, 'I have this against you' and He proceeded to tell them what their fault was. In the five churches that had faults, the first requirement was to repent (Revelation 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19).

When Peter preached the message of repentance, the people came under conviction and realised they were not right with God. They knew God would require an account of their lives for what they had done and especially their ill treatment of the Messiah. They asked what they could do to be saved from the wrath of God and Peter gave them the only clear answer. 'Repent, be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38). That is God's answer to the question of what we should do to be reconciled to God. It is sad some church leaders have split up the answer, but there are three steps to take; repent, be baptised, receive the Holy Spirit. God's program has not changed. There is no softening of these requirements in the New Testament. Every person who repented was immediately baptised in water. Anybody who claims forgiveness without baptism is in error. We need those three steps so we can lead an effective Christian life, but the first requirement is always repentance.

Before Jesus came, God ignored the ignorance of sinful people but from the time of Jesus, God requires all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). There are no exceptions. All people everywhere does not leave out anyone, anywhere. We are urged, both Jews and Gentiles, to turn in repentance to God and to have faith in Jesus (Acts 20:21). Repentance is part of the foundation of faith along with baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection and eternal judgement. To escape eternal judgement, we need to repent and keep repenting throughout our lives.

God is getting everything ready for Jesus' second coming, just as He did the first time. The hour and the day are fixed and are known by God the Father, and Jesus said it is not for us to know exactly when (Acts 1:7). It is not possible for Jesus to come until there is repentance and the way has been prepared. Just as repentance was the major requirement for His first coming, so it is for His second. It makes no difference what church we attend, if it is not teaching God's way, then it is the wrong way and God's way is the way of repentance. Some church leaders are more concerned about money and their church programs than what is written in the Word of God. Without pure, genuine repentance, no one can understand the will and purposes of God. We need to repent of all sin so we can develop a close relationship with God. All people have to turn and repent, saved and unsaved alike, and this is not optional it is a command of God. We all need to be willing to admit our sins. If we confess our sin to God He will forgive us but we must first admit we are sinners then tell God what we have done. He cannot be shocked because He already knows what we have done, but we need to take responsibility for our own sin and deal with it. We need to make ourselves ready for the second coming of the Lord (Revelation 19:7).

When we have repented and are walking closely with the Lord, we then have the right to repent on behalf of our suburb, city, state and nation. When the Lord speaks of repentance, He speaks to nations as much as He speaks to individual people. For examples of Godly people who repented on behalf of their nation, we can read about Moses, Daniel and Nehemiah. Moses was on top of Mount Sinai, communing with God and receiving the revelation of God's purpose and plan for Israel. Because of the way the children of Israel sinned, danced around and worshipped the golden calf, God was exceedingly angry. So angry, He was going to destroy the whole nation of Israel. Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. Now I will go up to the Lord. Perhaps I will be able to make atonement for your sin." Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin and have made themselves gods of gold. Yet now, if You will, forgive their sin' (Exodus 32:30 to 32). Moses saved a whole nation by repenting on their behalf.

Daniel realised the seventy years of exile from Jerusalem had almost run their course and it was time for God to restore Jerusalem to the Jewish people once again. Daniel responded to this revelation with the correct action. He fasted and sought the Lord, wearing sackcloth and ashes. Daniel was a very righteous man and there is no record of sin in his life, yet he repeatedly said, "We have sinned. We have done this wrong and that wrong ... Our sins and iniquities ... Confessing my sin and the sin of my people." He could have been self-righteous and said, "Israel has sinned. They have done this and that wrong," but he was humble enough to include himself in his prayer of repentance for Israel. Daniel fasted for three weeks before an answer came. 'I set my face to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, wearing sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession and said, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and mercy with those who love Him and keep His commandments. We have sinned and done wickedly and have rebelled, turning aside from Your commandments. We have not listened to Your prophets who spoke in Your name to our kings and fathers and to all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs to You ... O Lord, shame belongs to us ... because we have sinned against You. To the Lord our God belong forgiveness and mercy, for we have rebelled against Him and we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God ... Yes, we have all transgressed Your Laws, turning aside so we may not obey Your voice, therefore the curse has been poured out on us ... yet we have not earnestly sought forgiveness so we might turn from our iniquities and become wise in Your truth ... and now O Lord our God ... as at this day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly! O Lord, according to Your righteousness, please let Your anger and Your wrath be turned away ... O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord listen and act! Do not delay, O my God." While I was speaking in prayer, Gabriel ... came near to me and touched me about the time of the evening sacrifice' (Daniel 9:3 to 21).

Nehemiah also repented for his nation. 'I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God Who keeps covenant and mercy for those who love Him and keep His commandments. Let Your ear be attentive and let Your eyes be open to the prayer of Your servant ... confessing our sins which we have sinned against You. Yes, I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept Your commandments ... Lord let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant (Nehemiah) and to the prayer of Your servants (Israel) who delight to fear Your name'" (Nehemiah 1:4 to 7).

When the Lord instructed the Israelites to obey His commandments, He set before them a chance to receive His blessings and a threat of curses if they did not obey. 'Behold, I set before you this day, a blessing and a curse. The blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day; and a curse if you will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God' (Deuteronomy 11:26 to 28). Obedience to the Lord brings blessings of peace, rain and harvest but disobedience brings a curse that affects people all over the world. War, drought, diseases, earthquakes, severe storms, locusts, failed crops, famine, poverty, barrenness and miscarriage are all signs of a curse brought down because of disobedience and sin. "I withheld the rain from you ... I caused it to rain on one city and caused it not rain on another, and the ground that did not have rain, withered ... I smote you with blight and with mildew. I laid waste your gardens and your vineyards, your fig trees and your olive trees. The locust devoured, yet you did not return to Me. I have sent among you pestilence (disease), your young men I slew with the sword (war), yet you did not return to Me", says the Lord (Amos 4:7 to 10). Have farmers ever thought that drought, fruit blight, insect plagues and mildew on their crops may be the result of sin? That is something we need to tell our food producers so we can pray for them, encourage them to repent, then they can enjoy great harvests.

If a nation repents, the Lord will reverse the evil He intends to do to them. It is the Lord Who plants nations. "If that nation turn from their evil, I will reverse My decision concerning the evil that I thought to do to them. At another time I will speak concerning a nation that I will build up and plant" (Jeremiah 18:8 & 9). The Lord only allows catastrophes to happen to bring a nation to repentance. When disasters happen, there are always people who turn to seek God, and that is always the reason God allows the effects of a curse. "If I shut up heaven so no rain falls, or if I command locusts, or if I send pestilence, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and will turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, forgive their sins and heal their land. Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer offered in this place" (2 Chronicles 7:13 to 15).

Daniel did not pray against anything evil that was going on in his nation, he humbled himself by wearing sackcloth and ashes, he fasted then confessed their sin and repented. Daniel did not assault strongholds, he simply prayed and asked forgiveness on behalf of his people. Daniel saw the need to repent and he prayed, not knowing the Archangel Michael and heaven's messenger Gabriel, would come to him. We need to have a similar attitude because we never know how or when God will answer our prayer. All nations have some evil and some good within them. We need to repent of the evil like Daniel and Nehemiah did, and be thankful for the good. 'I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving' (Jonah 2:9).

When the Gentile city of Nineveh heard through Jonah there was to be God's judgement on their city (Jonah 1:2), every person in that city including the king (their leader), humbled themselves and repented with fasting, and the Lord changed His mind. 'The people of Nineveh believed in God and proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest of them to the least of them. The news reached the king of Nineveh. He arose from his throne, he laid his royal robe aside, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. He made a proclamation throughout Nineveh, ... "Let neither man nor beast ... not feed nor drink water. Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and let them cry mightily to God. Yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and revoke His sentence against us and turn away from His fierce anger so we may not perish." God saw their works, how they turned from evil and He revoked His sentence of evil He said He would do to them, and He did not do it' (Jonah 3:5 to 10). Notice these three very important things; (1) the king realised violence was the wickedness of which they needed to repent. (2) The king humbled himself, joined his people, repented and called for repentance. (3) The king did not repent of any area not under his jurisdiction. We must also follow that example. We cannot repent on behalf of any nation that is not ours. We can pray for them, but we cannot repent on their behalf if they are not within our boundaries because we do not have any spiritual authority over any area that is not ours.

The Lord blesses a nation that has a righteous leader, and we as the general population need to pray for the Lord to raise up righteous people to lead us; leaders who will stand before the Lord. 'When the righteous are in authority the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan' (Proverbs 29:2). 'I counsel you to make petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving for all people including kings, all leaders and those in authority, so we may lead quiet, peaceful lives, being Godly and upright in everything, for such prayer is good and pleasing to God our Saviour' (1 Timothy 2:1 to 3). When we walk with God, He expects us to pray for our leaders. We need to pray for the Lord to raise up Godly leaders – those with Godly principles – even if they do not attend our church or denomination. We need to pray for them to make decisions and laws based on God's Word. When we lift our governments up in prayer, that pleases God. We need to recognise we are all sinners and we all need to repent, so without any feeling of superiority, we need to humbly pray for our leaders and repent on behalf of those who do not know God and therefore have not yet repented. By doing that, we can reverse God's judgement on our nations.

One example of that is when Australia was in the grip of drought. For ten years, we had so little rain things were becoming desperate. We prayed for the Lord to raise up leaders with Christian principles and praise the Lord we have had two Godly Prime Ministers lead our nation – John Howard and Kevin Rudd. They are not perfect, but they have Godly principles, they attend church wherever they are in the world, whenever possible. Then we prayed and asked the Lord to show us the reason for the drought. Once we repented on behalf of our nation and asked the Lord to bless our nation, we have had rain in abundance; we have enjoyed medical breakthroughs; when other nations near us suffered earthquakes and tidal surges, Australia was spared. We have, as a nation, enjoyed great financial prosperity under the leadership of John Howard, and that prosperity has continued under Kevin Rudd's leadership, so much so, that when other countries suffered a financial melt-down, Australia was mostly spared. That can only happen when God is in control, and we need to give Him all the glory and praise. 'When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice'. Australia is the Great Southern Land of the Holy Spirit – the uttermost part of the earth – set aside for His glory (Acts 1:8; 13:47). As long as the believers of our nation continue to humble ourselves and pray and seek His face, and continue to support God's holy nation of Israel, we will continue to be blessed.

All believers around the world need to pray for their own nations and their own leaders. The one person God looks for in a crisis is an intercessor. It displeases the Lord when there is no one who is willing to intercede (Isaiah 59:15 & 16). Job cried out for an intercessor or mediator (Job 9:33). The Lord sought an intercessor to stand in the gap between Him and mankind, but He did not find one righteous, praying person who was willing so He poured out His indignation and wrath on the people (Ezekiel 22:25 & 31). When we read this whole text, we can see whom God holds responsible for wickedness in a nation. He blames the false prophets (verse 25), the priests (verse 26), the princes (verse 27) and lastly the people (verse 29). If we look at those titles in the modern world, we see the Lord puts the blame for wickedness of a nation at the door of the prophets (false prophets who teach lies from the pulpit), priests (spiritual leaders like pastors and elders), princes (secular leaders; governments) and to a lesser degree, the people. Notice in this scripture, the prophets had covered up the sin (daubed them with whitewash). God did not go to the leaders or a large group of people, but He looked for one certain type of person – someone to stand in the gap – an intercessor. In that desperate situation, one genuine intercessor could have changed the course of history at that time. The scriptures confirm this observation. If we read the history of the Jewish people, we will see when they had an evil king, the people acted wickedly. When they had a Godly king, the people did well in the sight of God.

How do you see your nation today? Is your nation similar to the days of Ezekiel? Is there guilt and sin in your nation, like every nation around the world? Are you a person who would be willing to stand in the gap and pray for your people? ... your government? ... your nation? ... your country? Has God called you to be an intercessor to stand in the gap? We can all pray and ask the Lord what particular sin our nation needs to repent of and we can gather a group of Godly people to agree together, repent on behalf of our nation and watch God bring blessings and withhold disasters. There will always be sin because we live in a fallen world but sometimes sin seems to accumulate then God will send judgement for the purpose of bringing repentance. 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore and repent' (Revelation 3:19).

Amen and God bless you.

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