



The Ups & Downs of the Christian Life – Part 1

The Joy of True Repentance

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Well, I recently read about a comic book, an original Superman edition, that sold at an auction for over six million dollars. Original sales price, 10 cents. That's when it came out back in the day, 10 cents. Now, if I wanted this afternoon to go to find the man who bought it and sit down in his house and thumb through the magazine myself, it's not going to happen. It's not going to happen. Heritage Auctions that sold it said the bidder was anonymous, it's housed in an undisclosed location, and it certainly is under lock and key, and I can't read that comic book this afternoon. Years ago when I was in seminary, I was out on the East Coast traveling and I was near New Haven, Connecticut and I thought, well, you know, Yale University is here and I had studied enough to know there were some very important early manuscripts of the New Testament that are housed in the Antiquities Library. So I thought to myself, why not? Let's try. So I went to the library, I found the Antiquities Library down in the basement and I went to the front desk and I said I'd like to see, I knew it was called Papyrus 49, Papyrus 50, I'd like to see those, please. And they said, OK, here's a form. I filled out a one-page form, and they said sit right here. The antiquities librarian came down, said come to this little room, called a research room. And I sat in the research room and she said, I'll be right back. And she came back with two documents. And these are pre-Nicene documents. This is like within 100 years of the close of the writing of the New Testament. So these are very old manuscripts, one from Ephesians and certainly the one from Acts, very old. And it's over 1,800 years old. And she brought them in, put them right in front of me on the desk and said here. And I looked at them, and I looked at her because these manuscripts were papyri they were sandwiched between two panes of glass. And around the edge was like duct tape that you'd buy from Home Depot. I looked back at her and she kind of got a sense of like, what you don't like that? And she said... Yeah, I apologize for the tape job. And then she left the room. And I sat there reading through the oldest extant manuscripts that we have of the Word of God. And I thought to myself our world certainly doesn't know what's valuable.

Think about it. I mean, the world sees a comic book that was written in the 1930s as priceless. And yet, I went in as a curious seminarian and just said I want to see these documents of the Bible, please. And they brought them in, put them right on a table in front of me and left the room. No guards, no lock and key, just there you go. Amazing. And I thought to myself the world has no idea. The things that they value, as Jesus clearly says to us through the writers of the apostles, are just ridiculous. And the things that God values sometimes we don't see the value in them. And I think that's how we can think about the world, clearly. But the problem is that that kind of thinking happens right here in the church about some things that we don't often think about. We value some things we can get really jazzed about, really excited about. And heaven is going, OK, whatever. And then there are things that happen. They happen this week in our church. They happened last week in our church. They will happen this week in our church. At some level, it will happen. And I guarantee you, we will, I mean, we'll see it as positive, perhaps, it might be met with some skepticism. You might give it a thumbs up in a home fellowship group, a text thread, and it'll be like, oh, that's good. And heaven, on the other hand, is amped, rejoicing in heaven. Some



of you know, well, because you read the title, the subtitle of our sermon today, and some of you are Sunday school grads, immediately you're thinking of passages in the New Testament to say, yeah, I guess you're right. There are some things that heaven gets very excited about that maybe we don't value like we should. And the topic, of course, is repentance.

And I'm talking about repentance, not just the kind of repentance that I might call throughout this sermon, salvific repentance. In other words, the repentance that begins the Christian life. But as Luther said five hundred years ago, there's a repentance that continues on throughout the Christian life. You have repented, I trust, of several things just in the last month, if not the last week. I mean, there is a continual repenting. And we'll just call that throughout the sermon a Christian repentance. Christians repent of several things and certainly non-Christians will get to the place where God grants them this wonderful, amazing experience of repenting of their sins, kind of throwing themselves on the mercy of God and those are huge, huge issues. I mean those are monumental issues that heaven erupts in cheers. I mean, that's the concept of what the New Testament tells us. Jesus himself tells us that. And what we need to learn, even though the word repentance is not in the four verses in Second Corinthians Chapter 2 that we're going to study this morning, I guarantee you it's there. Not only is it there, it is something we need to learn to value the way that God does. We need to understand why perhaps we don't value it like we should. We need to start to readjust our priorities about this. We need to see it every time it happens anytime we're in, you know, the environment of this taking place, it ought to be shared and it ought to be celebrated. And so I'm going to learn how to do that from this text, Second Corinthians Chapter 2.

If you look at it with me, we're going to study verses 5 through 8, just four verses this morning. But I want us to see what God says is so fundamentally important that you might want to throw a party this week on earth because heaven has already started one every time we hear about repentance. Not just salvific repentance, I will make the case that even the repentance that takes place in your heart this week, something that happens in the life of someone in your small group who was doing the wrong thing and says, you know what, I realized that God convicted me of it. Our discussion last week, a book I read, in my quiet time, a sermon, they're going to say, I got to stop. And we need to rejoice. And sometimes it's someone hearing a sermon or reading the Bible or having some discussion in a small group where they realize, I'm not doing something I should do. You know, I realize all this talk about serving and using my gifts is good, I wasn't doing it. But now they begin or I wasn't giving or I wasn't evangelizing or I really wasn't praying or I wasn't reading my Bible and they start. Do you realize that's repentance? And it is so important to heaven. I mean, it is priceless. And sometimes we're just like, ah, that's nice. We've got to do more than that.

Take a look at this text. You remember the context. You might want to glance at verse 4 as you remember that Paul, last time we were together studying this, he was talking about how painful it was to write this letter to them, right? He wrote this letter about sin in the church and he says, you know, "I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and many tears," and he says, "not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you." Now this is the kind of weird oxymoronic experience that was going on in the sense that, you know, it was painful for him to write it. It was painful to him for read it. It was painful



when he showed up on the painful visit that he talks about at the beginning of this chapter, and there's a lot of pain talked about. But now he says in verse 5, notice he says this, I'll read from the English Standard Version, here's what it says, "Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure -- not to put it too severely -- to all of you." He says it did cause him pain. He just admitted that in verse 4. It was painful for you to even point it out. It was painful for me to show up. It was a painful visit. You were pained by it. A lot of pain going on, but he says ultimately it was a pain to you all. You as a church, you as the people, because there was sin in the context, it caused you pain. Now, here's the great thing about verse 5. All you've got to do is crack open some commentaries, some scholars, some PhD New Testament guys, they're going to look at this, and everyone's going to try to scratch their head until their hair falls out, trying and figure out what is this all about?

Now, there are all kinds of, you know, a hypothesis here and a theory here and an idea here, and some will trace it back to First Corinthians in the early chapter, pointing out the man who's in an incestuous relationship, and no one really knows. Most people say, well, it's probably not that, because it's between the second and third missionary journey, he goes to Corinth, and then he changes his plan about going to Corinth on the way to Macedonia. In fact, it's just like, we're not sure what this is, and it's just like God as I study this that I think you know what? If it's obscure, if I can't figure out exactly what this is, there must be a reason for it. And it's not because we haven't worked hard to figure out what this might be. Some people speculate maybe it's one of the critics who criticized Paul who caused all this pain. We're not sure. And when God kind of does that to us and doesn't give us enough clues, I think it's for our good because one of the things that may be easy for us to do is to kind of wiggle our way out of the conviction of this passage if we had specifically, it'd be a lot easier, know what the problem was because then we'd say well I don't have to do it because it's not that problem. That's not the kind of repentance we're talking about here. I think this is left purposefully ambiguous to kind of give us the breadth of application that we should take away from this and that is, it doesn't really matter, ultimately. I can look throughout the Bible and know it doesn't ultimately matter what kind of sin it might be that someone has repented of. A sin of omission, a sin of commission, an egregious sin, an acceptable sin, a sin that makes you gasp, or a sin that's just like, yeah, everybody has that problem. When there's repentance, I know this about verse 5, it causes pain. It's a pain to the church.

You read our Daily Bible Reading not too long ago about the children of Israel going to the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership, and they go to the little city of Ai after they conquer Jericho and it doesn't go well because of a guy named Achan, aptly named Achan, because it caused a lot of pain, right? The whole Israelite tribes and the armies were aching, and the widows of soldiers who died in the battle were aching, all because one family decided to cover up the stealing of the contraband. And so it pained Israel to have Achan sin. And it would be better for him as he's tempted, or maybe even he started to haul it out if he put it back, if he repented, would have been better for everyone. And certainly it caused them pain. But he says now in verse 6, "For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough." Now understand that phrase, "The punishment by the majority is enough." Now here's where I would find repentance even if it's not used here in those last words, "is enough," it's enough. Why was the punishment enough? Because he had repented and I know that for certain by



reading verses 7 and 8. Clearly they need to forgive him because there was repentance, that's the pattern. So whatever they did, it was enough. Now punishment, before you roll up your sleeves and say, great, I've wanted to punish a few sinners in my small group. This is not corporal punishment. They didn't take him outside the back of the church and chain him to the wall and whip his back. They didn't cane him. They didn't beat him up, right? This word actually, linguistically, if you check it out, the core of this word comes from the word that we translate in the New Testament, "to rebuke." It's a kind of punishment that definitely feels bad. That's why it was such a painful visit. That's why it was such a painful letter. It feels bad, but really is based on the fact that there are words involved, calling someone out, you're in sin, this is not the way it ought to be, a confrontation. And the majority of the church was all about it. And while this was being done and however this was being done, people were nodding, yeah, you shouldn't do this, this was wrong. So the punishment by the majority, the confrontation of the sin in the church, whatever it was, it was enough. Why was it enough? Because that confrontation led to a kind of sorrow that he'll explain later in the book is a sorrow that leads to repentance.

Now we get these wonderful two verses here, verses 7 and 8. If it's enough and the guy's repented, you addressed it and it's been dealt with, "So you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." The whole point was it was hard for you to confront him. It was hard for him to hear it. It was hard on the church as a whole that there was sin like this in the church, whatever it might have been. And I'm just saying the pain part should stop now. Right? Done. Forgiveness, right? Let's not overwhelm him. Let's instead comfort him. And then he uses a very strong verb here. He says, "I beg you," I beg you, "reaffirm your love for him." I love this, forgiveness, comfort, love. This is where the passage goes. Now you saw the title of our very short series here. It's four weeks long. I've called it "The Ups and Downs of the Christian Life," and I'm very happy to report that on the first installment of our "ups" and "downs" journey through these verses, that these first four verses are an "up." Hold your applause, but it's an "up," and we're not going to talk about a "down." Next week we'll talk about a "down," or next time we deal with this, two weeks from now. But here's the thing. This is an "up" and the up doesn't feel like an "up" when you start talking about pain that's been caused, but this pain has come to an end in this passage because there's been repentance. So this is good. And I want us to see this as good. It's good when you hear, like I've heard, I think in the last two weeks probably five times, that repentance has been granted to a non-Christian in our church, we'll call it salvific repentance. Someone has come to repentance and become a Christian through the ministries or relations to the people in the church. Now, those are just the ones that come to my desk. But five new Christians, that's amazing. That's amazing because their non-Christian life has ended and they've started the Christian life.

But there are a lot more than five acts of repentance that have gone on in our congregation. And if you're in a sub-congregation or a small group as you ought to be, even someone that starts going to a sub-congregation or a small group gets involved in some relationship beyond the throng as it's put in the Old Testament, the congregation on Sunday, well, that in itself is an act of repentance. Someone who's engaged in something that they should be doing, they know they ought to do, and if you know the right thing to do and you don't do it to him, it's



sin. So sin has stopped in a number of ways, sometimes in small, sometimes in medium, and sometimes in large issues. And all of those are important. And I'm going to start with verse 5, just to think of this, even though it sounds like a downer, it's an "up" in the Christian life because when I think about this, Paul is writing this after the man had repented. And he says if there was pain, and I'm not trying to dwell on this, to grind this in your nose, but the pain wasn't so much me confronting it, or me visiting you, or you having to confront it. It's ultimately that you were pained by this sin because that's something fundamental. You start thinking about sin the way you ought to. Just like I said, sometimes we don't value things the way God does. Sometimes we don't have the kind of horror and egregious sense of something that heaven has. And sin is a cancer, and sin is going to cause pain and problem.

As a matter of fact, repentance is going to lead us to a righteous response to our sin, and that righteousness is going to lead to what we ought to have. Right? Christian thriving, Christian flourishing, the flourishing of people's lives, right? We're choosing life when we're choosing to do what's right and we stop doing wrong. That repentance is a good thing because it halts the pain and effect of sin in one particular compartment of life, in one person's life, and some area of his life that he shares with you at a small group or on a prayer list thread, you know, an email. That's a great thing, because the pain of sin has been curtailed. I'll put it this way. Number one, we need to think in these terms. "Get Excited about Ending Sin's Pain." That's what repentance does. Get excited. If we're going to celebrate repentance, it starts with this. I know that if repentance takes place there's some damage that ends. Let's start with salvific repentance, okay? Turn with me to Matthew 7, just to remind you of this. Now I was going to take you to Matthew 25, but I decided to be nice since this was an "up" sermon. But were I talking about this salvific repentance I could go deep. And if you don't smile at me, I may go deep because this is huge. When a non-Christian is granted repentance, I just want you to think about what has changed. When someone's name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life what has changed? When somebody is transferred out of the domain of darkness, as Paul put it to the Colossians, and becomes a child adopted into God's family who enters into the kingdom, like, legally, forensically, is adopted into the kingdom of light. What big difference is that?

Well, let's look at this roads analogy that Jesus gives us. Matthew 7 verse 13, "Enter by the narrow gate." Why do I want to get on the narrow gate? If you're going to get through the narrow gate and want to walk on that narrow road I need to remember there's a road that most people are on, the majority of people are on. Everyone's born on this road. "For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many." The whole world is going down a path that is not going to end well for them. But, verse 14, "The gate is narrow and the way is hard." That's why we should really get excited about repentance, not only because of what it cancels, but that was not easy to do. Matter of fact, the Bible says it's impossible to do. You're dead in your transgressions and sins and someone has cried out to God with a penitent faith. That's an amazing thing. "The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." And when God adds another soul to the few, to the little flock, to the group of people who call themselves Christians and are redeemed by the blood of Christ, that's a huge thing. Because hell is canceled. To put it in terms of another analogy in the same passage take a look at verse 26. He's talking about



responding to his words. And ultimately, the most important words to respond to are the words of your call to be a Christian, to repent of your sins and to become a follower of Christ, putting your trust in him for your salvation. And he says in verse 26, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them," which all of us did before we became Christians, we said, I don't want to submit my life to Christ. I don't want to trust in Christ. I'm good enough. I'm fine. I don't need a savior. If you don't do what God says, you're "like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." It's called the Second Death. One thing to die and meet your Maker, it's another thing when you step into his presence, go back up to verse 23 and hear the words from your Maker, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

I could quote later in the gospel of Matthew, because I didn't see enough smiles I guess, and quote the passage, it didn't just depart from me, it's "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." Those are pretty devastating words. But this is an "up" sermon, so all I'm trying to say to you is when someone repents, all that's canceled. There's never going to be a Christian in our midst who experiences salvific repentance is ever going to hear, "Depart from me." Never. You're never going to hear, "you cursed ones." You never are going to hear you're going to go to the place where I'm going to punish the angelic rebels, you're going to be a human in a place where you're going to be punished for your sins and your rebellion. That's never going to happen.

You may not believe in hell. Speaking of Yale, I was looking at the director of the graduate school at Yale Divinity School, and he was talking about how the words of Christ, you know, they're not really true. Not really true. It's not true. All of it just kind of gets us to think and Jesus talked about stuff and he doesn't really have the answers. It was just scary to listen to this man from Yale with his tweed jacket and little patches on his elbows with his beard, looking very astute, very erudite, telling us none of this really matters. There's no real truth in what he's telling us here. Oh, there's some truth that's supposed to be catalytic for our thinking. You know, get us to think. It should provide us with more questions than it does answers, because the answers, we're not really buying the answers. I mean, I'm paraphrasing, but you go listen to the PhD yourself and you'll hear this. One reason I'm not interested in doing anything at Yale except looking through their Antiquities Library. I don't want to matriculate through their program because they don't believe the words of Christ. And if you really want to believe some liberal divinity professor in Connecticut, you can do that or you can listen to the one who died and rose again. Who has all authority, who says I'm going to return again on the clouds in the glory of my Father with all the angels, and I'm going to separate the people into two groups, like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. You can believe Jesus, and he talked more about judgment than he did about heaven. And I'm just telling you, if you hear, like I did, I think five people I heard put their trust in Christ in the last 14 days through the ministries of our church, and those are the only ones that made it to my phone text thread. And I am saying, none of those five people are going to hear from God, "D from me, you who are cursed." That's big.



And I'm telling you, it's more than just a thumbs up, which I must admit with much conviction that that's probably what I did on the text thread. Like that's cool. Like that comic book, that's an original Superman, well that is cool, right? It's not cool. It's the difference between heaven and hell. It is eternally significant. It's profound. We ought to see that pain, eternal pain comes to an end. To quote Dante, through these gates, you enter into an eternal reality. Because before my creator, the heading on the archways, the hell says, everything my creator created was eternal. In eternal, I shall stand. Abandon all hope, you who enter here. Five people I know in my little sphere of influence here, in my orbit, not that I had a part individually in those conversions, they're never going to walk through those gates. I know it's an imaginary setting there with a sign over the entrance, but they'll never have to abandon hope because they're never going to enter into a place of judgment. "There's no condemnation for those in Christ." It's a big deal. You would admit that.

Well, there may be stories that you hear, like when we have baptisms, people tell their story of salvific repentance, putting hell to an end. But I want to remind you that every Christian in your small group who says, I wasn't doing the right thing and now I am, or I was doing the wrong thing but now I'm not, that's called repentance. And it may have taken some kind of confrontation, maybe one person in front of them in the Partners meeting, or it could be no one confronted them personally. But if they confess to you that there's been repentance I just want to tell you that's a big deal, too, for a couple of reasons. Just jot this one down. Galatians Chapter 6 verses 6 and 7. Now I know you know this passage, but it starts with two phrases that we need to remember. "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked." Is that a good prompt for some of you that memorized this passage? "Do not to be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows," you know the rest, "that will he also reap." And then it says, if you "sow to his flesh, you reap from the flesh," here's the word, "corruption." Do you want human flourishing? Do you want to thrive? Do you want life to be the way it ought to be? Well, then you should stay away from indulging in the temptations of the flesh. And if you've indulged in the temptations of the flesh, whatever it might be, your ethics at work, I don't know, right? Whatever it might be, you just need to realize when it stops, you've stopped sowing to the flesh. And therefore you're going to reap less corruption. That's a really good thing. Not to mention that if you repent, maybe it did take a little extra oomph from God. It's called discipline in Hebrews Chapter 12 and the word there is translated I think at least in the English Standard Version "chastisement," it's a different word than the punishment that's translated here that's rooted in the word "to rebuke." That word is literally "to spank." It's an illustration.

And he says just like every father disciplines his children, so it is that our Father disciplines every son that he receives. Equal opportunity, by the way, every daughter as well. But that's what the text reads. Every child is disciplined by God. Why? Because all of us stumble in many ways. And you stumble enough, long enough, as I like to say, dad will get off the couch and he's ready to enforce some discipline. And, you know what I'm talking about, there's a lot of grace. There's a lot of let's see what happens. And then God steps up, and as that text goes on to say, without the analogy, all discipline, talking about now from God, it's not pleasant, it's painful. And just like when your kids no longer responded to corporal punishment, they were responding more to getting grounded for the weekend, or not getting



to drive their car, or whatever it might be. That kind of punishment, that kind of discipline, that chastisement is more painful, and God knows what's painful to you. It could be bashing your car accidentally into another car in the parking lot. It could be not getting your promotion. It could be having the doctor say, yes, you have it and it's not going to go well, you need surgery. I don't know what it is, but it's painful. But the great thing about repentance is after discipline does its work, what's discipline for? Repentance. "It says then afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." That sounds good. What's the difference between painful experiences with your relationship with God and "the peaceful fruit of righteousness"? Repentance. When someone says they've repented, you can know this, you're no longer sowing to something that's going to result in corruption that in some way it is not going to be good for you. Secondly, here's the thing, God isn't going to discipline you anymore. That's the great thing. You cease from discipline.

Let's go to something much more personal and subjective. Turn with me to Psalm 32. Psalm 32, one of the famous psalms about contrition and repentance. Psalm 32. Look how it starts here with two great words that start off verse 1 and verse 2 translated into English "blessed." It's the Hebrew word "Ešer," which is one of the names of the sons of Jacob, Asher. And some of our parents are starting to call their kids around the church Asher, that's a great name, a Hebrew word. And it means at least here in this text, it's translated as "blessed." But you can know that it certainly includes what is just a common translation and that is "happy." Happy. It's like some of these little babies, they smile more than they cry. You're like, that's a happy kid. Asher is a nice little nickname for a happy baby. And here's the thing, happiness is certainly true of someone, verse 1, "whose transgressions have been forgiven." It's great when you're no longer held accountable and all your sins have been atoned for, they've been covered. Happy is the man. "Blessed is the man," contented is the man, the peaceful fruit of righteousness comes to the man, "against whom the Lord counts no iniquity." Now, how does that happen? Repentance. Do you want to spell out repentance? It is in the last line of verse 2, "In whose spirit there is no deceit." Do you know what happened to the man in Corinth who was confronted by the majority of people in one way or another, whether it was nodding heads with the person who spoke for the apostle or spoke or responded to the apostle's letter, whatever it was, right? It was that he got honest with himself about what was going on. He finally said, yep, that's me. That's really one of the component parts of repentance. It's called confession, agreement.

And I want you to think about that. When that happens, you're basically saying, like that man in the story that Jesus told, he's that tax collector standing on the Temple Mount and he says, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." I agree I am a sinner. And he owned it so much so that he wouldn't look up to the sky as he called out to God. He beat his chest. Have mercy on me, a sinner. Well, there was another man there, the Pharisee in Jesus' story, and he didn't have any contrition. He didn't even think he was a sinner. As a matter of fact, he compared himself to everyone else. I'm glad I'm not like this guy, I'm glad I'm not like that guy, I'm glad I'm better than all these people. Look at all the things I do, I am glad I am not a sinner. And Jesus goes, you know, only one of these guys "went home justified." What does that mean? Forgiven. Who was seen to be, as this text says, having his sins not counted against him. That's a great word. A great concept, the word "Logizomai" in the New Testament as it quotes this in



Romans Chapter 4, it's like an accounting term. God is now imputing to him as a righteous person the fact that he trusts God enough to say you can be merciful to me and I agree with you that I'm a sinner. That's repentance. It includes in that "in whose spirit there's no deceit." That's good news. I'd like to live in that, but the problem is we often live when we haven't repented in verses 3 and 4. "When I kept silent," I didn't really come out and say, God, you're right, I tried to pretend I wasn't wrong, "my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." You better drink some milk, or I don't know, take some supplements or something, because your bones are... This is not literal, your bones, but you feel this way sometimes, I trust. You know what it's like. And then it says this, "For day and night your hand was heavy upon me." Even before dad gets off the couch, as soon as you sin and cover it up, God's hand starts to push down on you. Do you feel that? And it says day and night, your hand was heavy upon me, my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. It's like I was out in the desert with no water.

You read with us, I hope, that covenant that God makes in Deuteronomy Chapter 28 in our Daily Bible Reading recently. One of the things it says there at the end of that very long chapter when it talks about what happens if you guys become idolaters in the Promised Land I'm about to give you, he said you're going to feel bad. And he gives a lot of different external things, objective things, and then it speaks to the subjective. He says, you know, in the mornings, you're going to wish it was night, and in the nighttime, you going to wish it's morning. I just think this phrase here, day and night, like I never felt right. My strength was dried up. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul confronts the Corinthians in his first letter that we have and he says you're treating the Lord's Supper like a potluck, and everyone's trying to elbow each other to the front of the line, and it just is not good. The unity of your church is completely just demoralized. It's just not working. And he says this is the reason. You have not judged yourself rightly, therefore God is judging you. Yes, he's disciplining his own church. He says, that's why some of "you are weak, and ill, and some have even died." Weakness. Do you feel like this? Maybe it's because you haven't repented of something going on in your life. There's something you know is the right thing to do but you're not doing it, and to you it is sin, and God is saying, a heavy hand on you. In the mornings it was nighttime, in the nighttime you wish for morning. That kind of fatigue, the weakness he talks about. Maybe I'm even diagnosed with some disease. But the Bible's really clear. When those things happen it may be God's discipline. You should at least ask, "search ... my heart! Try me," Psalm 139, see if there's any wicked way in me. That would be a good place to start.

So what does he do? How does he get to verses 1 and 2? Well, "I acknowledge my sin to you." That's what I did. That's why I'm praising God in verses 1 and 2 that I'm happy now. "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,'" and then here's the word, "and you forgave the iniquities of my sin." There's no penitence for us to do. There's only this grief over our sin that recognizes it's causing problems and the problem depicted in verse 5 of Second Corinthians Chapter 2 is pain, it causes pain. It causes pain to you, it causes pain to the church and I can't neglect to say that because it does cause pain to the church. And if I had time I would take you to Galatians Chapter 5 and I'd have you compare verse 20 to verse 22. There are all the things in those lists about the fruit of the flesh and the Fruit of the Spirit, if I can pair it that way. It's



clear that many of the things that come from you covering your sin and failing to repent in some area of your life are things that mess up the community, that mess up our relationships, that messed up our church. Envy, strife, jealousy, enmity, dissensions, all that takes place. We're covering it up. But here's the thing, you respond to the Spirit and you confess your sins because his Spirit has been grieved and he's letting you know because he's convicting you. And then you say, you know, I'm done with all that. Well, then you get these things: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness. Listen to the first things on the list. They're all things that would make a church a really great place to be. Because you know the sin in your church that wasn't dealt with it was a pain to you all. I know it's painful for me, Paul, to write it. But that's a small thing compared to the problem that you guys have. Repentance is such a good thing for our church. It's such a good thing for your guilt in your interior life. It's so good as it relates to sowing and reaping discipline. All those things stop if there would be real biblical repentance. That's Christian repentance. A Christian life is filled with this. I hope you've repented several times in the last month for things that God has pointed out to you, through a sermon, a Bible study, reading the Bible, reading a Christian book. But get excited about the fact that all that pain can end, sin's pain can end.

Verse 6, back in our passage, Second Corinthians Chapter 2 verse 6, he says it's enough. What you guys have done to deal with this is enough. Maybe not everyone agreed with it, it might have been a source of contention in the church, but the majority of people realized the sin, the sin was confronted, heads were nodding, and the person who was doing this who was causing pain in his life, in your life, in his interior life, here's the thing: it's enough. Why is it enough? Because the guy repented. The word's not here but repentance took place. And I just want to say it this way because I've said it this way throughout the sermon. I want to make sure you write it down. Number two, "Be Grateful for Genuine Repentance." And I'm not talking like you're thankful like the news anchors in November who are thankful about everything to no one. I'm talking about you being specifically thankful to God for repentance. Once you jot that down, that we're supposed to be grateful, and of course that implies the object, we're grateful to God for repentance. We're grateful to God for genuine repentance. I want you then to turn with me to Second Timothy, because I want to show you, let's just start with Christian repentance. Here is the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy, a young pastor pastoring a church in Ephesus. And he says here, let's start in verse 23, Second Timothy Chapter 2 verse 23, 2:23. "Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels." Now, he's not concerned about Timothy starting these. He's concerned about Timothy engaging in these. And he calls them, Paul does, "foolish and ignorant controversy." And I'll bet as Timothy's reading this for the first time, he is nodding his head. Yep, yep, yep. I know those guys. They are foolish and ignorant. Right? He knows this is going on. He says and all it's doing is causing problems in this church. And every pastor, by the way, who has been a pastor for more than a month, knows the problem, and it hurts.

As he looks at his church and he sees division, he sees quarreling, he sees dissension, he sees enmity, he sees strife, he sees jealousy, he sees envy and it's like, look at this mess. It's really not about the issues anymore. It's about them. And there are all these controversies going on and he says, hey, Timothy, you got to rise above this. Verse 24, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome," don't get engaged in that stuff, you got to be kind, you got to keep



teaching, you got to patiently endure evil, right? You're called to ministry, this is your life. You have to endure it, put up with it. So you do nothing about it, shrug your shoulders and walk away. No, no, no. You have corrected it. Verse 25, "Correcting his opponents with gentleness." These are his opponents, foolish and ignorant people starting controversy that are leading to increasing dissension and quarrels. Those are people who oppose him and oppose this ministry and oppose the health of the church. You've got to correct them. Now do it gently, do it with gentleness, that "God," notice this, "may perhaps grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." Now, if you knew the truth you wouldn't be causing these problems. There wouldn't be the gossip, there wouldn't be the dissension, there would be the backbiting, there wouldn't all this stuff. Now some of it maybe starts with sin, is that the catalytic, you know, the fuel of it? Maybe, but look what it's created. And he's saying in our passage, in verse 5 of Second Corinthians 2, stop, it's enough, no more pain, no more trouble. Now correct your opponents with gentleness and what we're hoping for, which took place in Corinth, God granted repentance. Who did? God did. I mean, the object, the subject is right there. "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth," but that's not the end of the sentence, "that they may come to their senses," no longer foolish, no longer ignorant, verse 23. Verse 26 says, "And escape the snare," the trap, "of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will."

Satan is active in our church right now, right now in our church this week, and the more you're involved in the church the more we start to see this. And he's taking people captive by engaging in things that ultimately, from God's perspective, from heaven's perspective are foolish and ignorant. You guys value conversations sometimes that are foolish and ignorant and they cause trouble in the church. And God is saying what we really want is repentance because repentance stops all that. But where does it come from? In this passage, God grants it. And when it happens, when someone stops doing the wrong thing, when somebody stops not doing the right thing and they start doing the right thing, we should all say, thank you, God. That's the first thing we ought to say. God is the grantor of repentance. And that's what we want. This is a God thing. We're not talking about just kind of sucking it up, pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps, trying to do better. We are talking about God granting that I'm a sinner, I've done wrong, it's time for me to turn from this.

Just jot this down, if you want to think about salvific repentance, as long as I'm trying to be thorough here, Acts 11:18, here a Roman centurion. You know, there were Romans there mocking Christ, beating Christ in the face. Peter was running and hiding and all that had happened. And now Peter's called to win a Roman centurion at the Maritime Caesarea, which was a port for the Roman army, to go to Caesaria and win a guy to Christ named Cornelius who was in the Roman army. A leader in the Roman army. Can you imagine that? Well, the cohort that goes with him, they all watch what goes down there. And in verse 18, it says, "When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life,'" so salvific repentance. They're saying, just like he granted it to us, the Jews, he's granted it to the Gentiles. So then God has granted repentance. All repentance is a gift from God, and it is such a wonderful thing for us to stop and be grateful for, grateful to God.



Now the passage you thought about in the introduction of this sermon, go to Luke 15, Luke Chapter 15. Jesus tells three stories here, which is the first passage, I hope, that kind of came to your mind when I talk about how we don't value repentance the way that heaven does, the way that God does. Well, here's my biblical prompt for that. I can say that with all authority because look what's said in verse 7 after the parable of a guy losing his sheep. Now, no one's tending sheep in our church, but I'll bet some of you have a dog. Probably some of you have more than one dog. Let's say you're really strange, you have 10 dogs. And your 10 dogs, one of them gets out and runs away. And you're a dog person so you are heartbroken. So you do, you know, what I used to see all the time as a kid, you go make copies at Kinkos and you put them up all over the place looking for your lost dog. And you are tearful as you search and go, "Hey Fluffy, Fluffy where are you Fluffy?" And you do this for three days. And finally you find Fluffy under an overpass shivering in the cold. And you grab Fluffy, you put Fluffy in your purse. (audience laughing) You walk back to your other nine dogs. I'll bet you're going to talk to your friends about this. I bet you are going to post on Facebook about it. I bet you are going to be happy. And this is the feeling. I found my lost sheep. Verse 7, "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 righteous persons that need no repentance." Salvific repentance, wow, I hope you understand that.

I hope when we have baptisms up here, you never want to say, well, I thought we were going to study Second Corinthians. That was really a bummer. Now, I'm flattered that you would want me to preach to you for an hour. But I hope you're much more excited about celebrating people's stories of repentance. That should be something that you celebrate in your heart and you say, this is more important than me just making sure I get a sermon to keep me on the right path. Now, we got to do that. That's the bread and butter of the Christian life that you hear preaching that will exhort you to walk the straight and narrow. That's important. But hearing about repentance, and I don't care how bad the stories are, I don't care how you gasp and clutch your pearls, oh, that's crass, I can't believe he did that, right? I still want you to say that is something that got heaven more excited than you continuing to read your Bible, study your Bible, pray, and share the gospel at work. That's important, keep doing it. And you should do it. Will you be rewarded for it? Absolutely, you're going to be rewarded. Is it good? It's good. But it's better that God granted salvific repentance to someone who's up here in this tank testifying.

Secondly, Christian repentance. You're in your small group, someone comes in and says, you know what, I was convicted by what we talked about last week, so I started to do something I hadn't been doing and I know it's the right thing to do. That is better to celebrate that ten times as much as someone saying, yeah, you know what? I found a job. Okay, well, that's great. We all want you to have gainful employment. It's an answer to prayer. But someone stopping sin that causes pain and corruption and discipline and besmirches the body of Christ, that is huge. Or someone says I was doing this but you know what I came to conviction of this and I'm not doing it anymore. Huge. Verse 10 and you know this. The next story is about you losing your wallet, right? You lose your wallet. You've lost your wallet before and thought it was gone. I had my wallet knocked out of my briefcase, fell under a chair. I don't know how I missed it. I searched for two days to find my wallet. I found my wallet. I wanted to throw a party. I don't want to replace everything in my wallet. Now here, this lady lost a coin, right?



She lost her coin, she had 10 coins, she lost one, 10% of her portfolio now has been depleted. And she finds it and Jesus says, "Just so, I tell you, there's joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." You've just got to know how big a deal it is in heaven.

And, of course, the prodigal son story, which is about a son who was lost and now is found. I mean, look at the flavor and the contour and the color and dimension of this, verse 20 "And he," the sinning son, "arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, he ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'" Do you know what that spells? Repentance. He's repentant. And "The father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Bring the fattened calf,'" pick the fattest one we got, "and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and he's alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to," what's the word? "Celebrate." You better be grateful. The kind of gratitude that leads to celebration. This is huge. Now why was this being told? Look at the last verse of Chapter 14. Chapter 14, scroll up to Luke 14:35. He's just told a story about salt. And if salt isn't salty, it's just sand. And if it's sand, you might as well throw it out. And then he says at the end of this, which he said many times it's recorded in the gospels, he must have said it a lot verbally. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." That's a great statement. You've got ears, but you ought to be listening. Your kid has the little inner ear bones vibrating like crazy when he's looking at his screen and you say stuff to him. He kind of has ears to hear but he's not listening. He's not hearing you. And the point is, we need people to hear what Jesus says. What kind of hearing? The kind of hearing that hears what he says and responds rightly to it. Now, verse 1 Chapter 15, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him to," here's the same word, "hear him." That's just literary poetry right there, right? He's teaching his disciples, he says, listen to this. If you have ears to hear, please hear this. And the next line, hey, there was a day when Jesus was there, he had a lot of notorious sinners, the turncoat Jews who were collecting taxes for the Romans and really some notorious sinners and prostitute types, they were all coming to Jesus and they were hearing him. They were listening. Verse 2, "The Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man received sinners and eats with them.'"

That's why Jesus tells these three stories. And the punchline really didn't come with the lost sheep or the lost wallet. Drop down to verse 25. It came with the story of the lost son. "Now his older brother," verse 25, "was in the field, and as he came and he drew near to the house, he heard the music and the dancing." What kind of celebration was this? Huge. For what? Because someone had squandered the money of the inheritance of the father? No. Because he repented. Repentance is bigger than the damage caused by the sin. And it should be celebrated. "And he called," this older brother, "one of the servants and he said," what in the world is going on? "and asked what do these things meant. And he said, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he's received him back safe and sound.'" Verse 28, and his brother was so happy and he went and put on his best coat and he got his own shoes. And he says, have they killed the fattened calf yet? I can't wait to celebrate repentance. Did you read all that in verse 28? No. He was just like the Pharisees. "He was angry and refused to go in." And his father came out and begged him, what are you doing?



Please, he entreated him. And "He answered, 'Father, look, this many years I've served you, and I've never disobeyed your commands, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours,'" this stinking rotten brother of mine, "who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!" What a sinner, I can't believe it. "And the father said to him, 'Son, you're always with me and all that's mine is yours. It is fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and he's alive, he was lost, and is found.'" If you can't celebrate someone who is repentant, whether it's a small sin or a big sin, whether it is salvific repentance or Christian repentance, you're not doing what you ought to do. A thumbs up on a text thread is not good enough. You need to get your heart involved with this and value it the way heaven does because a lot of pain has just stopped. Pain that you may not even be able to sketch out on some kind of flow chart, but it would come, and it would come big time when the storm hits the life would collapse in some small way or big. Be grateful for genuine repentance.

Verses 7 and 8, quickly. Verses 7 and 8 Second Corinthians Chapter 2. So it's enough. Everybody's done, we're done with all the rebukes. We're down with all the pain. Can we stop all the pain now? Now what we need, verse 7, is you should rather turn, right? You've kind of turned your back on this guy and you've spoken over your shoulder and said you're in sin, you ought to repent. Now he's done it. It's enough. Now what? "Turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow." If everyone acted like the older brother when the son came back. He's already felt bad about it and he already thinks he's unworthy. He's already come in penitent confession and said I've blown it. I'm not even worthy to be called your son. And now you want to walk in and wag your finger with reproach and say I can't believe you did all that stuff. No, no, no. You missed the point. I repented. He probably didn't even have the energy to say that to his brother. See, we have to be the bigger person. We have to be the person who says, I am here to celebrate what you have just repented of. Dry your tears. We're done with the pain. It's time now for us to enjoy the celebration, the reconciliation. Number three, let's put it that way, "Invest More in Loving Reconciliation." That hardly captures the full weight of what I'm trying to say. But you got to lean into the fact that we are no longer shunning, we're no longer holding people in probation, we're no longer saying, I don't believe it, we're not doing any of that. We're forgiving and comforting. And I didn't even finish reading it. "Turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed with excessive sorrow," we don't want any of that, "so I beg you to reaffirm your love for him." You better show twice as much love than you did ever in this person's life.

One of my favorite psalms, I often say this as I turn and reference this, is Psalm 103. And in Psalm 103, I often read these middle verses, verses 10 through 14 and I think about how great God's forgiveness is toward me. And I assume you read the psalms that way. Often you read this passage like this. Isn't it great that God forgives us like this? But the New Testament tells us that just as God forgave us, so also I ought to forgive my brother. So I have to learn to forgive the way God forgives. And God forbid that we keep reading this only about God's forgiveness toward me. It's the template as to how you ought to forgive others. So let's read it that way. Five verses, verses 10 through 14, five ways that you should forgive the people who come in your small group, in your circle, in your Partner's session, whatever you find out when someone has been repentant about something, sin of omission or sin of commission.



Respond like this, verse 10, "God does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities." Would you agree with that? Aren't you grateful knowing all the sins that you've committed that God does not treat you as though you owe him back for all those pains that you have caused him? How much pain did the younger brother cause the father? Tons. How hard was it for him? Hard. How much pain did he cause? A lot. And yet what did he do? He lavished him with a kind of forgiveness that said you don't owe me anything. He didn't then garnish his wages as a son and say you're going to pay me back. I put it this way in my notes and there's no payback. When someone is repentant you don't hold whatever they've done against them and say well you've got to make up for this, you got to pay us back. That's not the kind of forgiveness that God gave you and I don't expect us to have that standard for people when we say hey brother you've repented, we forgive you. What kind of forgiveness is it? It's a kind of forgiveness that says there's no payback here.

Now is there restitution if someone steals from you? Of course, right? Fine. But I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the kind of thing when someone says I was in this vice and it stopped. We don't cross our arms and go, well, you better double up your payback. We can't treat people the way God does not treat us. Verse 11, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love," his covenant love, his faithful love, his "Hesed," great word, his deep, abiding, committed love, "for those who fear him." Now, those who fear him, obviously, we're talking about the repentant. This is about people who have confessed their sins and repented. And what does God say? Well, we really start to see the contours and the dimensions, the depth, the breadth, the width of God's love when we see him lavish love on us, the repentant children of God. So, I'm saying this. I need to have a kind of lavish extra kind of love. Love, what is love? Favor, ready to serve. I'm ready to lay down my life for a sinner who's repented. I mean, that's just how it should be. I should favor them, just flood them, lavish them with favor. No payback, extra love. Look at verse 12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgression from us." As far as the east is from the west, that is infinite. So far does he remove our transgressions from us now. The New Testament word I often say, "Aphiemi," the Greek New Testament word for "forgiveness" is often symbolized, my old pastor would say, is like your palms down dropping it. Which is great because if you're a man my size, you're dropping it like five feet down to the ground. But this is a great text. It's like going to the bottomless pit and dropping the sin into that. I'm not going to hold this. I'm releasing you from it. I am not going to look at you as the person you once were. I going to look at you now as a forgiven, repentant Christian, even if we're talking about Christian repentance and not just salvific repentance. And we've got to, I put it this way, full release. I don't see you in light of that sin now. Such were some of you, but you're washed. You're new. "If anyone's in Christ, they're a new creation." We'll get to those verses in Second Corinthians. But what a great picture of a full release. No payback, extra love, full release.

Number four, verse 13, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him." One thing about little children. The first time you tell them not to do something, and they say, oh, I'm sorry, Dad. It's not like, that's it. Never again. If you had that kind of kid then something's wrong with him. Most depraved children have to be told, if not disciplined, multiple times for the same thing. And depending on how heartily depraved they are, it can be years of discipline for the same sin. But you know what a father has toward



his children, even a strong-willed child? A lot of compassion. Like, you're out. I'm now going to formally divorce you as my child. There's a lot of divorce going on, but it's usually not parents divorcing their children. Have you noticed that? Because parents have compassion for their children. Jesus said, and here's the real problem for some of you who cross your arms and say, well, we'll see, we'll see. Jesus said in the gospel of Luke Chapter 17 verses 3 and 4, hey, if someone sins against you, forgive him, right? If he's repentant, forgive him. The next verse says, and if he sins against you seven times in one day and comes to you seven times and says, I repent, forgive him. Seven times in one day? About the fifth time I'm going to say, you don't mean it. The text doesn't say if he means it, it says if he says it. Now, it certainly excludes the con man. But I'm talking about the sincere person. And you know what parents do with children? They show a lot of compassion. I want a kind of extra compassion that says I could forgive you six more times today for the same thing, even if it's not a sin against us. No payback, verse 10. Extra love, verse 11. Full release, verse 12. Extra compassion, like a father shows compassion on a child, verse 13.

The last one, verse 14, "For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." Now, it's one thing to think about the compassion of a father toward a child, but here's the thing about us. We look laterally in God, at the triune God. And I understand he's a sympathetic high priest because the second person the Godhead put on human form, was tempted in every way as we are. So that's one thing, I get it. He can identify with us only because of that special miracle, the incarnation. But you shouldn't have a real big problem when someone says to you in their small group that they have confessed their sin about something and they've repented. And before you throw your hand over your mouth shocked, all I'd have to do is put the brainoscope on your memory and show everyone on a screen everything you've ever done. You should absolutely have no problem remembering that we are all people with feet of clay, right? It should be that you should know, as James Chapter 3 verse 2 says, "We all stumble in many ways." This is James, this is the half-brother of Christ saying, "We all stumble in many ways." There's only one without sin. So all I'm saying is there has got to be this understanding, this full understanding of humans and our own sin. And if you can think that way about the next time you hear someone repenting, you hear whatever it is they've repented of, I would hope there'd be a full understanding of our own humanity. No payback, verse 10, extra love, verse 11, full release, verse 12, extra compassion, verse 13, full understanding. And if you don't have it, just wait. First Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 12, to the "one who thinks he stands take heed lest you fall."

Just one line in Isaiah 55, I love this, it leads me to my sense of what it is to forgive, to comfort, to not excessively continue any pain, but to reaffirm my love. It's the kind of forgiveness that God gives us. It's a great text, and I can't read it all, but we ought to call upon the Lord, we ought to forsake our way, we ought to, "Return to the Lord," it says, "that he may have compassion on him," and that's the connection in my mind. I went from Psalm 103 to Isaiah 55:7. God's going to have compassion on us as repentant people. It says, return to him, "and to our God," the Lord, ... our God, "for he will," I just love this phrase. Don't you love this phrase? "For he will abundantly pardon." I hope we can be known for abundant pardon, abundant. Is there abundant pardon active in this church? I hope so. You know, in Nehemiah, this is the post-exilic period. Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Ezra, these guys were all helping to lead



the people back into Israel. They had forsaken a lot of the things they were supposed to be doing, and they started reading the law, they constructed a platform for it, and everyone started getting convicted and they started crying. They start crying. And they know that they have sinned. Well, in that set of tears, it's not a crying that didn't lead to repentance. They were repentant. And Nehemiah, it says in Chapter 8 verse 9, he said to the people, stop it. "This day is holy to the Lord your God, do not mourn and do not weep." Stop! But you "heard the words of the Law." And he says that people were weeping because they were hearing the Word the Lord, they were reading from the scrolls. "Then he said to them, 'Go your way. Eat the fat and drink the sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our God. Do not be grieved,'" now here's the line, "for the joy of the Lord is our strength."

That word's been ripped out of context a lot and put on, you know, Day Spring cards and we don't even know what it's about. Do you know what it is about? It's about being a rejoicing person who in the wake of repentance knows that God fully pardons, abundantly pardons us. We can look around and say, man, we've sinned. We've fallen short of the glory of God. And someone may bring that up in a particular sin in their life, where it may be a salvific repentance. But here's the thing. It's time to rejoice. It's not time to look back at the damage caused by the sin. It's time to look forward. The father did not look back and say son, look what you cost me. There was no reproach. There was a celebration. There was dancing. There was feasting. "So the Levites calmed the people down," verse 11, "saying, 'Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.' And all the people went their way to eat and drink and send portions," to one another, "with great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them," which were words not only you're a sinner and God forgives, but God abundantly forgives. His pardon is abundant.

I know it's not easy to rejoice at someone's repentance. But imagine Christ on the cross and you being the Apostle John, everyone else pretty much runs away. You're hiding in the shadows behind Mary. And you're watching Jesus on the cross. And let's just imagine for a minute. Let's just speculate here. Just historical fiction for a moment. You hear one of the criminals call out to the other mocking Jesus. And you recognize the voice, I've heard that voice. And this thief that now when you get out from behind Mary, you recognize the face. Yeah, I'd never forget that voice, I'd never forget that face. That thief had come to Galilee, had put a knife to your throat, had stolen two days of fish out of the hull of your boat, had gone through your pockets, had stolen everything important to you that you had on your person, went into your camp, found your little chest of silver coins, took them all, punched you in the gut and left up into the hills of Galilee. And you stood there like most people would when they're ripped off feeling violated and angry, wanting your pound of flesh. Now you're sitting there watching him mock Jesus on the cross. I mean, you can almost see John, like, standing out, standing up, straightening up. And then you hear him, an hour later, call out to the other criminal. He says you need to stop. We're all getting what we deserve up here. This man has done nothing. You think, wow.

Even like the centurion standing around who started to realize Jesus was dying in a particular way. This is not what people said he was, this is not what the Pharisees thought. And then he



cries out to Jesus, hey, "when you come into your kingdom remember me." And Jesus turns, this Jesus who you spent three and a half years with, who you love, looks to him, this man who ripped you off and held a knife to your throat and Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, today you'll be with me in paradise." And then he breathes his last, then he says, "It is finished," and dies. And you watch as that criminal continues to suffer on that cross. I just wonder the challenge you'll have looking at a man who you have every reason to hate because his sin was against you personally and a lot of other people. And Jesus just said, he's your brother. He has just confessed with a penitence and a confession of his own sin his trust in Jesus as the only way to be right with God. And Jesus confirmed his faith by saying today you're going to be with me in paradise. When you die you're going to meet me. We'll see each other in a whole other dimension. I know that kind of forgiveness is hard. It's hard for abundant forgiveness, full release of the sin. I know it's hard to lavish on him favor and to not say, well, I don't know, he'll probably get off the cross. If he ever did get off of the cross, he'd be a criminal. You'd have to get past all of that and say, I need to forgive as Christ forgave. I know that's the hardest kind of forgiveness. And though I haven't really been talking about people who sin against you, all sin ultimately, as Paul said in verse 5, it hurts us all. Let's be abundant in our pardon, just like God has been abundant in his pardon toward us.

Stand with me, let me dismiss you with a word of prayer. God, we stand before you with a great sense of need, not only for us to be increasingly punctuated by repentance, which is your gracious gift to us, but the joy in response to repentance is our strength. Our church could be so much stronger if we could value what you value, if we can celebrate as much as heaven celebrates with the repentance taking place in the circle of our church right here in the middle of South Orange County people coming to faith in Christ and people growing in their faith and forsaking sin and pursuing righteousness. God let us celebrate that more. Let us get excited about it even when the sin is appalling to us or even when the sin has affected us, even when we see the consequence or the corruption that spilled over into our lives, let us recognize when the Lord has forgiven and abundantly pardoned how dare we not get on board with that and celebrate. Let us not be the older brother. Let us be more like the father, willing to put on our best clothes, put shoes on our feet, and participate in the party and celebrate the repentance that's taking place around us. And God, multiply the repentance. We started with that prayer. We want that to be. And then please, multiply this celebration among us. Thank you for this great "up" in the Christian life, the joy of true repentance, genuine repentance. May you multiply it here at Compass Bible Church.

In Jesus' name. Amen.