

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 10, 2008

What Repentance is to Produce

by Dan Trygg

“Produce worthy fruits of the repentance.”

Lk. 3:8

Last time, we talked about how repentance (a change of mind and heart, a change of one's perspective and worldview) was an important step toward preparing a way for the Lord to come into our lives. When the king's couriers would ride through the countryside and towns, announcing that the king would be traveling through the land, the people would leave their daily activities to go out to the road to remove stones, litter and debris, and fill in the potholes. Efforts would be made to beautify the roadsides. Buildings and fences would be whitewashed and painted. Flowers would be put alongside the roadside. Banners and flags would be hung in honor of the king's visit. All of this was invested to make the way for the king so that he would have a pleasant journey. The king would notice the special treatment, and be favorably inclined toward these subjects who “prepared the way” in this fashion. Those who took special steps to honor him would be honored *by* him. Similarly, those who were negligent about honoring the king in this fashion would be quite noticeable. As soon as the king's entourage came into the territory of those who did not work at “preparing the way”, the roads would have been rough, bumpy and the scenery would be filled with litter and trash. This would be interpreted as disrespect, inefficiency and general irresponsibility on the part of those who lived there. Remember, in those days the land typically belonged to the king. His subjects were responsible to care for the land as stewards or tenant farmers. It was in the king's interest to have people who took good care of his property, rather than those who let it go and did not care for it properly. A disregard of the king's visit meant that those people did not respect and value the king enough to depart from their regular schedule and prepare for his arrival. They had lost sight of the fact that they were answerable to the king. Through their arrogance and self-absorption, they were in danger of losing everything they had. The king expected certain things from them, and they were not holding up their end of the arrangement. As a result, the king might send his troops to evict the tenants, and give his land to others.

There are **two major lessons** to come from this word picture. **The first has to do with a fundamental truth of relationships.** God expressed this in the OT very succinctly in I Sam. 2:30, “Those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me (think little of Me) will be lightly esteemed.” It is another form of the basic principle of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7). **If you want a relationship with someone, you need to make positive investments toward that relationship.** If you want to have friends, **you must design your life to be attractive to the kind of people you want to have as friends** (I Cor. 9:19-22). If you are unkempt, smell bad and are grumpy, you probably will have trouble in your relationships. If you value other people enough to bathe, wear clean clothes, and show them consideration, then maybe you will not drive them away, and you can begin to make investments in their lives. Most people are not going to take the time to get to know you if you are unpleasant to be around. Just as this is true with our relationships with people, it is also a reality in our relationship with God. If you think little of God, and invest no time or energy toward getting to know Him, the chances are He will not be revealing Himself to you. If, however, you *do* want to know Him, you must show your interest in Him by adjusting your behavior to show Him honor, ...to live by *His* preferences, not yours. This is where the “prepare the way for the Lord” comes in.

The second lesson from this word picture **is that our lives are being evaluated by others.** People have expectations of us, and so does God. **The fruit of our lives will determine how others perceive and treat us.** If the king, or other landowner, does not feel that his tenant farmers are taking appropriate care of his land, or if they break their covenant with him by not honoring him, or by withholding the share of the crops which they had agreed to, he will take steps to punish them and remove them from his land (Matt. 21:33-45). If we were to lie to people, or treat them with disrespect, they will feel betrayed and abused, and will want to distance themselves from us. People who *say* they love you, but continue to repeatedly, blatantly do things that are hurtful, and are unwilling to change, are deceiving. They *may* even be deceiving *themselves*, but don't let them deceive you! Love does no wrong to other people (Rom. 13:10). Those who *say* one thing, but *do* another have some kind of disconnect going on with them, or they have an ulterior agenda. If their deeds continue to belie their words, you need to look at the deeds more than the words in order to grasp where the person's character and commitment to you really are. The same is true with our relationship with God. If we consistently and knowingly do things that are offensive to Him, especially things we *know* He has spoken to us about, what does that show about our commitment to Him, or where we rank Him in our lifestyle choices? Our behavior

speaks loudly that He is *not* important to us. Our behavior makes our words of profession look like a lie, ...like hypocrisy. Moreover, **God will judge us by our deeds, not just our words** (Matt. 16:27; II Cor. 5:10; 11:15; Rev. 20:12,13).

Let's talk for a moment about the concept described by John, "Make worthy fruits of the repentance" or, "**make repentance's worthy fruits**". The verb is "do" or "make". In a context where fruit bearing is being talked about, we could use the words "produce" or "bear", but *the main idea is that we are to do something*. **It is to be the outworking in our actions of what repentance started in our thoughts**. Without making choices that apply this inner thought-change to some tangible outward actions, there is no evidence of change, at all. Hebrews 11:1 says, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the *evidence* (visible exposure; proof) of things not seen." **Faith is the trust that moves idea into action, thereby exposing the inner thought to outward observation. If there is a true change of mind and heart, it should issue in different decisions, different choices, different actions, ...or the seed of repentance has not come to the fruition of faith.**

Let's take a closer look at the idea of *fruit*. "**Fruit**" implies the end result of a process. Oftentimes the process takes a period of time. If we apply that idea here, *repentance* may initiate an inner change that can take some time before it develops into *trust* (faith), leading to actions of *obedience*. This notion cuts us some slack, because sometimes change in our actions does not happen as fast as our initial repentance would seem to indicate. *It takes time to renew our minds*, to know how to live differently. **John's statement, "bring forth repentance's fruits" is an admonition to seize the momentary insight we have grasped, so we don't lose the new perception and understanding we have gained**. In the parable of the soils, Jesus spoke of how Satan was like the birds that would come along and snatch the word out of our hearts (Mk. 4:15). **We need to act on the word of God to plant it, and get it growing and producing change in our lives.**

Note that John begins his admonition to the crowds by pointing out their sinful natures. They were offspring of snakes. They could take no rest in their pedigree or heritage. Some liked to think they were better than others because of their ethnic background. Being Jewish, however, wouldn't help them. The sons of Abraham did not exactly have a great track record of righteousness! Besides, God could make sons of Abraham from the stones on the ground! No. That was all fruitless discussion and distraction. In reality, they were no better off than a bunch of snakes. **What they needed to do was to produce the fruits appropriate to an honest repentance**. Verse 8 reminds them that **time is short**. The axe is *already* laid at the root of the tree, ready to chop it down for its fruitlessness (cf. Lk. 13:6-9; Isa. 5:1-7). "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

They got the message. They could see that they were morally bankrupt. They did not have the fruit to show. **They did not deserve to be spared. What were they to do?** Three different groups ask John this question, "What shall we do?" John's answer to each is very specific, translating the change of mind into concrete decisions. He exhorted the crowds to share what they had with the poor, ...even down to the extra clothes and food they had! To the tax collectors, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." They were no longer to abuse the authority given to them, and enrich themselves by extortion or dishonest gain. When even soldiers asked, John replied, "No longer extort money by intimidation, or blackmail. Be content with your wages. Stop trying to cheat people." Bang. Bang. Bang. **John's answers were clear, crisp and to the point**. No one argued. They all could recognize that he was right. They all knew what he was talking about. There was nothing about what John said that they did not already know. **He identified specific examples of things they already knew were wrong**. If repentance was genuine, and it was going to filter down to real life, these were things that were going to have to change. Note that every area of offense that needed to change was something having to do with the treatment of other people. There was no "pray more" or "go to synagogue more". **Every example of change that John exhorted them to implement was an area where they had been abusing, or ignoring the needs of, other people. You can't love God if you don't love His kids.**

Finally, when people were recognizing the clear truth and authority of John's preaching, they began to wonder if He was the promised anointed king, the Christ. John quickly got them away from their speculations, because they were not practical. They did not help them deal with the important choices in their own lives that would determine their destiny. These thoughts were distractions from the real issue, so John pointed them back to reality. **There was, indeed, someone coming who was greater than John, but He was coming with a winnowing fork and fire**. These were word pictures drawn from agriculture. Wheat would be cut in the field, brought in to the threshing floor, where sledges would be dragged over the stalks and grain to separate the grain from the stalks and the chaff. At that point, a winnowing fork would be used to throw the wheat into the air, where the wind would blow the lighter stalks and chaff away from the heavier grain. The grain would be gathered up, but the chaff would be burned. **The lesson was clear: God is going to evaluate the fruit of our lives. What does not pass the test will be judged and destroyed.**