

The Lifestyle of Repentance
Pastor Joe Oakley - GFC – 4/21/24

We are in a sermon series entitled Greater Freedom. Last week I spoke on Laying the Ax to the Root of Sin. We get that from Matthew 3:10 which says:

The ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

We all have areas in our lives where we just try to control our outward behavior by telling ourselves, “No, stop it!” But if we don’t lay the ax to the root, it will just grow back.

That’s because many times we just deal with symptoms and outward behaviors without ever dealing with root causes of our problems. So – no matter how hard we try - the problems keep coming back.

In this series, we are dealing with the roots that need to be axed so we can live in freedom. We find those roots by understanding what Jesus came to earth to accomplish on our behalf. In Luke 4:18-19 Jesus said-

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

I believe those 6 ministries of Christ show us 6 roots we need to lay the ax to in order to live in greater freedom.

Last week I taught that the first root we need to ax is the root of sin. We do that through believing and obeying the gospel of Christ. Sin is rooted in self-centeredness and rebellion against God. Isaiah 53:6 says:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

The essence of sin is living like I want rather than how God wants. Living for myself rather than for God. And the only way to deal with sinful rebellion is through repentance.

Last week I mainly concentrated on initial repentance that occurs when we are born again by repenting of our sin and placing our faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Remember, repentance is more than conviction, sorrow or outward reformation. Repentance means to do an about face – a U turn.

Repentance means true change - a change of heart, change of mind, change of attitude, change of lifestyle.

Last week we taught on how God draws us to repentance by the message of the cross, by the conviction of the Holy Spirit, by godly sorrow and by His goodness. And we taught on how we repent by accepting responsibility for our sin, by confessing our sin, and by turning from sin and self to God.

Before we were saved, we went our own way and did our own thing. But initial repentance occurs at conversion, when we turned from sin, from self and from the world. We no longer place our faith in those things, but we place our faith in Jesus.

We are radically changed at the moment we receive Christ as Lord and Savior. We have a new heart, a new spirit and a new nature that desires to please God rather than self. But, we still have the same body and same soul – mind, will and emotions. Our will needs to be submitted to God, our emotions need to come under the control of the spirit, and our minds need to be renewed.

That means that once we are saved, we still have some changing to do. It's a lifetime of change which requires a lifestyle of repentance. That's why I'm preaching today on The Lifestyle of Repentance.

We must continually turn from sin and self to God. This is a lifelong daily thing. Jesus said in Luke 9:23:

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

Denying yourself is another way of saying dying to self. Dying to self is applying the work of the cross to our lives. Dying to self is yielding ourselves totally to the Lordship of Christ. When my thoughts or feelings conflict with God – I will choose to die to myself by saying NO to myself and YES to God.

By the way, we cannot even get saved without dying to self. That's because to be saved we must abandon all hope that we can save ourselves and we must trust totally in Jesus to save us.

What does it mean to take up your cross? It does not mean you must put up with sickness or some tragic or tough situation in life – such as “My mother-in-law is my cross to bear.” It means that we submit to God from our heart. On the night Jesus was betrayed, Mark 14:35-36 tells us:

Jesus prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting Him might pass Him by. "Abba, Father," He cried out, "everything is possible for You. Please take this cup of suffering away from Me. Nevertheless, let Your will

be done, not Mine." Jesus died to Himself and His will before He physically died on the cross.

Therefore, to take the cross is to choose to do God's will above our own. Being a disciple requires daily taking up our cross and dying to self.

Notice that Luke 9:23 says that dying to self is about self-denial. Also notice it is a daily thing, not a one-time thing. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:31 ***I die daily.*** Dying to self is not something you do once and it's over with. The lifestyle of repentance is a life-long process of choosing God's will over our own.

It's that's a good things because dying to self leads to life! Not only life in ourselves, but life in others. Listen to what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:10-12

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

In other words, when you die to self, it results in life in others. Husbands, when you die to self by laying down your life for your wife, it results in life and love in her. Living for yourself will kill her love for you. Wives, when you die to yourself by submitting to your husband as unto the Lord, it results in life and love in him. Living for yourself will kill his love for you.

I know this is not popular teaching in a world where you're told it's all about you, live for yourself, have it your way. But this is biblical teaching that says it's not all about you, that says to live for God and others, to have it God's way rather than your way. And ultimately, that will lead to the joy and fulfillment in life you seek.

Here are some practical examples of developing a lifestyle of repentance by dying self – by saying no to yourself and yes to God.

Dying to self is when...

- You give to God the tithe rather than spending it on yourself.
- You read your Bible instead of reading a novel.
- You go to church even when the Cowboys are playing.
- You go to your small group when you feel like staying home and watching TV.
- You choose to love someone you don't even like.
- You forgive when you'd rather get even or hold a grudge.
- You witness to someone you know will laugh at you for your faith.
- You take a stand for truth even when you're the only one standing.

Dying to self is when...

- You do what's right in spite of fear or shame or consequences.
- You don't sin even though everybody else is "doing it."
- You meet other people's needs even when your needs are not met.
- You bless those who curse you.

- You give to those who withhold from you.
- You do good to those who do you wrong.
- You go the extra mile and turn the other cheek.

This is what it means to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus! And you can't do any of that in your own strength. The only way to do any of these things is to die to self and be filled with the Spirit. I believe we will be filled with the Spirit to the level we die to self. John 3:30 says it this way:

He must increase, but I must decrease.

You cannot be full of yourself and full of the Holy Spirit at the same time. It's one or the other. You're either:
 Full of self or full of the Spirit
 Led by self or led by the Spirit
 Living for self or living for the Spirit

The only way for God to increase in your life is for you to decrease. It has to be less and less about you and more and more about Him. It has to be His will over yours.

A lifestyle of repentance requires you to take up your cross and follow Jesus every single day of your life. You see – as we walk through life we will be exposed to things unintentionally that need to be cleansed. Jesus dealt with this when He washed His disciples' feet during His last meal with the disciples. John 13:5-9 says:

He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet... He came to Simon Peter, who said to Him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." "No," said Peter, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with Me." "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

The reason Jesus said unless I wash you, you have no part with Me was not just about the washing, but about Peter submitting to Him. First Peter said that Jesus washing his feet was too much, then he said it was too little. As usual, Peter should have kept quiet and obeyed the Lord. Instead, He irreverently challenged Jesus and refused to submit to Him.

When Jesus said Peter would have no part with Him, He was saying Peter could not be His disciple without submitting to Him. The first requirement of discipleship is surrendering yourself to God. In John 13:10
Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean."

In those days people wore sandals and if they went out after bathing, they would need to wash their feet. Their body was clean, but their feet needed washing.

Here's the spiritual message Jesus gave – “I made you totally clean when you believed in Me – but as you walk through this world – your feet get dirty – you pick up dirt from your surroundings. So your feet need washing.” The part about having a bath speaks of believers who have been totally cleansed by the blood of Christ. This is our position before God: clean, guiltless, and righteous.

And if we sin, it does not affect our position in Christ, but it will affect our fellowship with Christ. If a believer sins, he does not need to go back to Calvary to be saved all over again, any more than a Roman needed to go back to the public bath for a complete bath just because his feet got dusty on the way home.

Our feet represent our daily walk in life. Do you ever feel dirty from your walk through life? Jesus wants to cleanse that. Known sin in the life that is held onto breaks our fellowship with Him. The only way to regain that fellowship is to confess our sins and receive cleansing. 1 John 1:9 says:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Don't fall into the trap of believing you've got to get saved again every time you sin. But don't fall into the opposite error of thinking you can live in sin and still be consecrated to God.

To be clean – we need to understand approaching God by the blood of Jesus and we need to live a lifestyle of repentance. We need forgiveness and we need cleansing. Christ gives us that through His blood – but also through washing.

This obviously speaks of water baptism – and we all need to be baptized - but it also speaks of the word of God. God's word plays a big role in a lifestyle of repentance. God's word plays a big role in God's change process in our lives.

We are initially changed through repentance and faith in Christ. Then God continues changing us through circumstances, through the Holy Spirit, through prayer and worship, through the influence of godly people, and through His Word.

We will talk more about renewing our minds with the Word in another message. I was going to teach on it today but I got another direction in my small group on Wednesday night. We discussed the ways in which the Holy Spirit convicts us and draws us to repentance. As we did, God brought to my mind Isaiah's vision of the Lord. Isaiah 6:1-4 says:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the

whole earth is full of His glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

Isaiah had a revelation of the holiness of God. When we say God is holy – we are saying that He is morally perfect, sinless, completely righteous, pure and good, without any flaw or evil. The essence of the word holy is to be set apart or separate from all else.

Holiness is what separates God from everything else. It's what makes Him different and distinct from any person or anything in the universe.

He is in an entirely different category of holiness and He is the only member! God is not ten times or a hundred times holier than us. He is infinitely holier than us. In fact, God is so holy that it requires the Holy Spirit to reveal the knowledge of the holy to us! And when we begin to understand it – it causes astonishment and awe and godly reverence and fear.

And then, a revelation of God's holiness always leads to a revelation of our lack of holiness. When Isaiah saw the holiness of God, he said this in Isaiah 6:5

"Woe is me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

You see – when Isaiah compared himself to other people, he saw himself as a righteous man, full of integrity and virtue. But one glimpse of the holiness of God changed all that.

When Isaiah saw God's holiness, he understood who God was and he understood who Isaiah was! He saw his sin and his guilt and he was in anguish! You see – when you see yourself in the light of God's holiness – you see that you are unrighteous, unclean and unholy compared to Him. But 1 John 1:7 says:

If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

We walk in the light by walking in the revelation of God. And as God is revealed to us, we see ourselves in His light. As we see His holiness, we see our own need for change. The desire for change, coupled with godly sorrow for our sin, causes us to continually turn from self to God. This is the lifestyle of repentance.

And thankfully, the God who is holy is also a God of grace! Aren't you glad for that? That's why... Our holy God made a provision to cleanse our sins. Isaiah 6:6-7 says:

Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and

said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

God did not allow Isaiah to remain in the anguish of condemnation. He immediately commanded an angel to jump into action. Isaiah was refined, forgiven, cleansed and made pure by God's holy fire.

That was a shadow of what was to come through Jesus Christ! God cleansed people by various ways in the Old Testament, including by the blood of sheep and goats. Hebrews 9:13-14 says:

Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, will cleanse our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God.

I love that it says, "how much more shall the blood of Christ cleanse you." When you sin you need to know how much more the blood of Christ forgives you! If you are addicted, you need to know how much more God can set you free! If you are lost, you need to see how much more God can save you!

And If you believe that God is holy – you need to know that He is actually much more holy!

God is not holy because He conforms to a standard – He is the standard!

God is not holy because He keeps the rules – He makes the rules!

God is not holy because He tries really hard to be!

It takes no effort for God to be holy – He alone is holy, holy, holy!!!!

The Lord God Almighty! Who was and is and is to come!

Because of that, Romans 12:1 tells us:

I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

You might have never thought of this, but developing a lifestyle of repentance by dying to yourself is an act of worship!

And as we die to self by choosing God's will rather than our own, we will be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

As we die to self, we will decrease and God will increase!

As we die to self, we will walk in resurrection life.

And as we develop a lifestyle of repentance, we will also be able to resist the enemy and walk in greater freedom.