

Repentance

October 2018

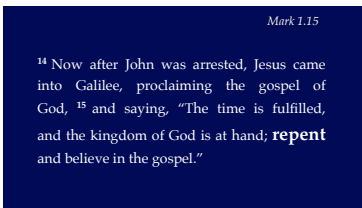


Opening

Continuing series on the words that make up the Gospel. If we better understand the words then we will better get the message of the Gospel.

Previous 3 messages in series are all available on line as text and audio.

This week's word is 'repentance'.



The first time we hear this is as a command from Jesus is in his first recorded sentence as a preacher: Mark 1:15

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

John the Baptist had conducted a ministry of baptism for repentance to prepare people for Jesus. They confessed themselves as sinners and he baptised them in the Jordan river. This was for people seeking God's forgiveness and cleaning in readiness for what was to come – the one whose sandals John was not fit to untie.

Then Jesus came proclaiming a new Gospel arriving there and then in himself. God had come close and for those who were interested it would be possible to live in the Reign of God as a redeemed child of God. The instruction was "Repent and believe."

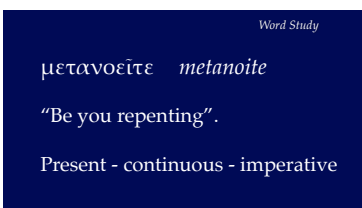
Word Study

Most people would think 'Repent' means stop sinning. It means turning away from sin – which is true. That is helpful explanation until you get to the Greek term and something bigger opens up.

The Greek word in this usage is μετανοεῖτε / *metanoiete*.

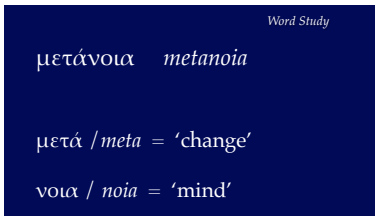
I want to draw out two observations about this word μετανοεῖτε we read here in English as 'repent'.

- 1 Firstly its grammatical character or 'parsing' It is plural, imperative, present continuous. So Jesus is saying: start repenting now and continue in repenting. Don't stop.



It's the way you might say 'breathe' to some a number of people being resuscitated after drowning. "Start breathing and don't stop."

So that is the force of the word.



- 2 But what does it mean it actually mean? What is repentance? The noun form opens it up as a word with two parts: **ΜΕΤÁ** and **ΝΟΙΑ**.
- ΜΕΤÁ** /*meta* means 'change'.
ΝΟΙΑ /*noia* means 'mind'.

Jesus calls for a response to him and his message that involves continuing mind change ... and active belief, faith or trust.

Turning away from sin is mere beginner's play or spiritual milk as Peter terms it in a letter. Repentance *as metanoia* is about a life-long commitment to changing or transforming one's mind.

Q: Why would he call for this?

A: To live in God's Kingdom as a redeemed child of God you need a new mind.

Our son Nathanael works in Artificial Intelligence and studies the functioning of the brain for the purpose of mimicking it with software. One of the questions he faces is defining the 'mind'. At least he has a word for it in English but then it gets complicated. It's close to the question of previous centuries asking: What is the soul?

Beyond the neurons and synaptic junctions of the brain, beyond the hormones and chemistry of our bodies, we are in there somewhere! The essential us (you or me) lives there and that conscious place of thinking and feeling - the place we perceive and process.

Jesus is bringing a Gospel message and calling for us to begin changing the way we are inside so that we think differently and are able to believe what Jesus says and who he is.

Q: Does this sound like an easy thing to do?

A: Have you tried changing at that level?

While the mind is more than neurons and neural transmitters they are involved. Science is teaching us today that for change to be permanent it needs to be hard wired into our brains. Change involves changing the hardware as well as the software of our brains. Existing neural pathways need to be replaced or written over. It takes lots of practice – a bit like learning to play the piano.

Let's sample how hard it is to change the brain's wiring with a simple exercise:

While sitting, rotate your right foot in a clockwise action. Keep doing that.

Now use one of your hands to draw a 6 in the air while continuing to rotate your foot clockwise.

Can you do it?

What would it take to be able to do that?

I suspect it would take a re-wiring but one so invasive that it would take a lot of learning.

The people who hear the Gospel and obey the command to *metanoia*-repentance begin a course of life long learning. They become 'disciples' at a level much more personal than the coordination of hands and feet.

Application:

So the call of God in the Gospel is to sign up to a life-time of learning and un-learning so that our minds are transformed for the privilege of living in the Reign of God established in Jesus. This is what mercy and grace should lead to.

It's so close, it is at hand, but it will require an ongoing mental re-boot or you will simply not get it. Once you begin *metanoia*-repentance you will be able to believe.

Q: So how do you do this *metanoia*?

A₁: I suggest the way to think about it is by considering the way we transform a house.
You throw rubbish out and take good things in.

A₂: Or in a garden, you pull out the weeds and plant healthy seeds.

A₃: Or in software you take the bugs out and streamline the architecture.

This is an aspect of the Gospel that not every Christian really understands.

St Paul wrote to young Christians about this in ways that make this clear. I would like to look at two such passages:

Romans 2:4

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So if things are going well repentance might not happen. There might not be any fruit of repentance or cause for heaven to celebrate over one person who is being transformed through repentance.

Q: If God has met our needs then why bother doing the hard work of personal transformation?

A: Grace received should get us going.

The Jesuits are an order of priests in the Roman Catholic Church with a discipline that is helpful here. As instituted by their founder - Ignatius of Loyola - Jesuits spent time each day - usually in the evening - examining the conscience. They take time to listen to their own mind and hear what it has to say. The conscience will quietly convict if given the opportunity.

Examining the conscience or the 'moral mind' invites us to make decisions about what needs to change and at what level. I would commend that as something worth considering. If we are serious about responding the loving grace of God as disciples, examining the conscience is worth doing. It will tell us what needs to change, what needs to be rejected within our lives and what needs to be promoted.

This goes without saying that we be intolerant of sin. If we recognize stinking thinking or see bad fruit, we need to throw it out and learn to adopt a right stance and right mind.

The second comment from Paul on repentance comes from 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 7:10

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The discovery or realisation of sin can lead to grief of various sort. Our sin can make us sad and very sorry. Paul differentiates between ‘godly grief’ and ‘worldly grief’. The difference is *metanoia*-repentance as proved by the fruit there of.

Grief before God over our sin in conduct, consciousness or condition, will lead to engagement with God. The sin in view will become ugly to our senses. What once seems attractive will now appear horrible and repulsive as if we have undertaken aversion therapy.

But there is a worldly grief that does not produce this fruit. I think worldly grief is more like the shame of being caught, or limited to sadness at the consequences and pain involved. It can involve sorrow and embarrassment that seeks recovery of relationship but not real change. Saying ‘sorry may allow everyone to move on but nothing really changes. It’s more about what people think than how God’s affected by it.

When David was exposed in his sin with Bathsheba he is credited with writing this Psalm 51
Listen and hear what Godly repentance sounds like. Hear references to sin in conduct, consciousness and condition as expressed around 900 BC.

Have mercy on me, O God,
 according to your steadfast love;
 according to your abundant mercy
 blot out my transgressions.
² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
 and cleanse me from my sin!
³ For I know my transgressions,
 and my sin is ever before me.
⁴ **Against you, you only, have I sinned
 and done what is evil in your sight,
 so that you may be justified in your words
 and blameless in your judgment.**
⁵ **Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
 and in sin did my mother conceive me.**
⁶ **Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
 and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.**
⁷ **Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
 wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
 let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
 and blot out all my iniquities.
¹⁰ **Create in me a clean heart, O God,
 and renew a right spirit within me.**
¹¹ **Cast me not away from your presence,
 and take not your Holy Spirit from me.**
¹² **Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
 and uphold me with a willing spirit.**

Psalm 51:1-12

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That is a godly confession seeking godly repentance.
It's all about him and God in the wake of what he had done.

David now sees himself in a whole new light.
This is the business of repentance. His mind is changed.
His relationship with God has changed, never to be the same again.
There is no record of him being promiscuous again.

This is repentance and such repentance is powerful.
It is powerful in response to the Gospel of God's Kingdom of Righteousness available in Mercy,
Grace through Jesus.

Conclusion:



So it comes to this: Are you a repentant and repenting believer?
Is this your ongoing MO?
When was the last time you repented?
How are you seeking to repent now?

Has a window to the Gospel opened up for you here?