

The Fruit of Repentance

Matthew 3:7-11 HCSB When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to the place of his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? (8) Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. (9) And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones! (10) Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees! Therefore every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. (11) "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to take off His sandals. He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Repentance, of course, is an essential starting point of the Christian journey. We begin our walk with God by admitting that we need Jesus' sacrifice and expressing our sorrow for the sin in our life. If we've had a genuine moment of repentance, we should necessarily see the fruits of repentance in our lives.

As we study these fruits, keep in mind the harsh words of John the Baptist in v. 7, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" He is talking to the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were very religious but also very distant from God. Many of us here this morning could easily claim to be very religious, but if we are not bearing the fruits of repentance, we too are very distant from God.

Verse 8 of our passage puts before us the command to "bear fruits worthy of repentance." The obvious and immediate question that comes to mind is, "What are the fruit of repentance?" Fortunately for us, our passage points us to four of the fruits of repentance.

1. Humility (v. 9)

- **Matthew 3:9 HCSB** And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones!

Here we are reminded not to rely on our family history. The Pharisees and Sadducees were quick to point out their Jewish family history as a proof of their closeness to God.

Today we see similar displays as you ask people if they're a Christian and they respond: "Oh, my family are all Methodists" or "Sure, my parents were Baptists." Our parents or our family cannot believe for us; we each must choose to believe for ourselves. This leads us to the first fruit of repentance, which is humility.

When we rely on our family history like the Pharisees and Sadducees, we get the ability to claim a relationship with God without the need to personally come to a moment of repentance. This creates a feeling of pride, rather than the humility that should characterize our relationship with God. ("My family has been in this church since 1964." "My father helped to build that education wing." "My mother led the women's circle for probably twenty years.")

We see a similar phenomenon when people try to claim a closeness to God that is not based in grace. The person who believes their work for the church or their Sunday morning attendance or their large financial contribution is what is maintaining their link to God will be led to a pride in their works.

When we begin at the point of repentance - bowing and admitting that we cannot earn our way into heaven, acknowledging our sin and questionable motives, speaking out our need for Jesus' blood, asking for God to forgive us - there is a humility that comes into our hearts that cannot come in any other way. We are sinners and yet God has forgiven us anyway - that is a humbling place to be, because you have received what you did not deserve.

Is your relationship with God characterized by humility, or are you lacking the fruit of repentance?

2. Urgency (v. 10a) -

- **Matthew 3:10 HCSB** Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees!
Therefore every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Often in our lives we feel that the sins we commit are individually small enough for us to excuse. We haven't committed an axe-murder or gone on a shooting spree. Our sins are nothing major - we can get around to them another day. But this verse points us to a second fruit of repentance: urgency.

When we come to a point of repentance, we realize our sins are not excusable. We recognize that, though we might be able to argue that our individual sins are small, the accumulated weight of even small sins puts in a most dangerous situation. We assess the truth of the situation and figure out: I'm in much worse shape than I thought I was.

With repentance comes the awareness of the seriousness of our sins and the desire that flows from that: to get this horrible problem taken care of right now.

The way this fruit should continue to show up in our life is: we have come to the point of repentance and a realization of the seriousness of our sin; we experience the joy and relief of God's forgiveness as we come to Him; we recognize that the cost of our forgiveness was Jesus' death on the cross; understanding that our sin cost Jesus' His life, we walk the journey of faith with the constant desire to become more like Him and to rid ourselves of the remaining sin in our lives. Not someday, but as soon as possible - because we recognize the urgency of the matter.

3. Change (v. 10b) -

- **Matthew 3:10 HCSB** Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees!
Therefore every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

We claim that finding God is not all about "religion," but rather it's about "relationship." We claim that we have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That means that every Christian claims to have had a personal encounter with the most powerful being in the universe.

You would tend to think if we've have had an encounter with the most powerful being in the universe that we would walk away different people, but, sadly, folks often claim to know God and yet live unaltered lives.

We are reminded in the last part of verse 10 of a third fruit of repentance, which is change. The church in America has for too long presumed that you can be a "Christian" even with absolutely no evidence of that in your life.

Henry Blackaby, author of *Experiencing God*, recently noted, "*There are just as many abortions inside the churches as outside the churches. There's only a one percent difference in gambling inside the churches as outside the churches. George Barna did a survey of 152 separate items comparing the lost world and the churches, and he said there is virtually no difference between the two.*" That is a serious accusation.

The Bible knows nothing of a faith that does not lead to a changed life. Jesus was very straightforward:

- **John 7:16-17 HCSB** Jesus answered them, "**My teaching isn't Mine but is from the One who sent Me. (17) If anyone wants to do His will, he will understand whether the teaching is from God or if I am speaking on My own.**"

- [John 14:23-24 HCSB](#) Jesus answered, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. (24) The one who doesn't love Me will not keep My words. The word that you hear is not Mine but is from the Father who sent Me.

James famously wrote,

- [James 2:14 HCSB](#) What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can his faith save him?
- [James 2:26 HCSB](#) For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

An essential part of genuine repentance is that it leads to a changed life.

4. Dependence (v.11)

- [Matthew 3:11 HCSB](#) "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to take off His sandals. He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

There is a lot that could be taught in this verse, but I want in particular to point out John's assertion that the one coming after him is "more powerful than I." This is a powerful Savior we're talking about.

The act of repentance includes admitting that you messed up, that you tried to run things on your own and you failed. A final fruit of repentance is dependence.

Recognizing in our repentance that we have fallen short, we admit our sin and, as we just noted, pursue a changed life. But, obviously, if we've failed in the past, we're going to need more strength than we possess to finish this journey we've now begun.

The good news for those of us in that position is that we serve a mighty Lord who is able to provide all the resources we need for victory in our journey. The key is that we must recognize our need to depend on Him and trust in His strength.

Too many of us are trying to experience "Victory in Jesus" via our own power, smarts, and insight. We will inevitably fail. Those who have started at the point of repentance will remember their failure and turn to the One who is able to bring them through.

Conclusion:

Ask yourself a simple question this morning: can you see the fruit of repentance in your life day-by-day, or are you standing this morning with the Pharisees and Sadducees?