

# The Gift Of Repentance

SPEAKER Mark Proper

DATE Sunday, July 28, 2024

PASSAGES Luke 15; Acts 2; Acts 11; Luke 5; 1 Corinthians 9; Proverbs 28; 1 John 1

MESSAGE Begins at 1:07:47 in the service

## THE BIG IDEA

Repentance is not the hard thing you get through in order to receive the good thing. Scripture calls it something God *grants* — a gift, like the forgiveness that follows it. And because it is a gift and not a toll, it is meant to keep happening: it is the ordinary way a Christian becomes free.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ To repent is to agree with God about your sin — which makes it an act of love toward him, not a punishment handed down by him.
- ◆ Acts describes repentance as something God *gives* and *grants*. Both repentance and forgiveness are gifts; neither is the fee for the other.
- ◆ Conviction arrives by many routes — mercy, a vision, a miracle, a healing. What they have in common is that God initiates.
- ◆ You can experience the touch of God and still walk away from it. Remember what he has done and tell those stories, or you will forget them.
- ◆ Greatness at anything requires constant reevaluation against the standard. Christians have a word for that, and it is repentance.
- ◆ Jesus told us to forgive seventy times seven — which means someone is expected to repent that often. Chronic repentance is normal Christianity, not failure.

- ◆ Confession kept between you and God alone tends not to hold. Sin grows in the dark, like bread left damp in a closet.

► 1:08:29

Mark opened with a line from Steven Wright — *imagine a world without hypotheticals* — and then asked the room to try a thought experiment just as absurd: imagine Christianity without repentance. He was candid that preparing the message had exposed something in himself. “I’ve got something whacked out in my brain about repentance,” he said. “I almost think of it as this really negative thing that you kind of have to go through before you get into faith. But it’s not that at all.”

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## 1. A word we have made heavier than it is

► 1:10:14

Most of us, he suggested, picture John the Baptist with a raised fist and a red face. So he went to the etymology instead. The Old French root means the state of being penitent — sorrow and contrition for wrongdoing — “resulting,” and he leaned on this part, “in vigorous abandonment of it in one’s life.” A second dictionary entry, from no Christian source, put it this way: repentance goes beyond feeling to express a distinct purpose of turning from sin to righteousness; the biblical word most often translated *repentance* means a change of mental and spiritual attitude toward sin.

Which produces the definition he returned to all morning: to repent is to agree with God that he is right and you are not, and to love him enough to say so out loud.

► 1:11:47

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

LUKE 15:7 ↗

Jesus is being playful there, Mark noted — there is no set of ninety-nine people who need no repentance. Either you understand that you need it or you don’t.

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## 2. The gift Peter kept describing

► 1:13:05

At Pentecost the crowd is cut to the heart and asks what to do. Peter's answer is the one every Christian knows:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

ACTS 2:37-39 ↗

Two thousand years later, Mark pointed out, every person in the room is one of the ones who are far off. Peter was prophesying about them. But the language he uses a few chapters on, hauled before the Sanhedrin, is the part worth slowing down for: God exalted Jesus at his right hand as Leader and Savior to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And when the church has to reckon with a Roman centurion's household receiving the Spirit, the room lands in the same place — “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life”.

So is repentance the work we do and salvation the gift we get? No, Mark said. Both are gifts. “Hey, I am going to change your heart so that you are going to agree with me about your sin.” He also liked how fast the apostles pivoted once they saw it — no further objections, only praise.

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### 3. Four ways the conviction arrives

► 1:17:26

If repentance is granted, how does the awareness of needing it reach us? Mark walked four routes, and did not claim they were all of them.

**Mercy.** The woman dragged before Jesus was not accused of adultery, she was caught in it. Her accusers leave, and Jesus tells her to go and sin no more. Mark refused to hear that as a warning. Picture his face lit up instead: *you don't have to do this anymore*. He staked it on a conviction he named as his own leap — Jesus does not require anything of us that he does not also give us the power to do.

**A vision.** Saul was zealous for the law and, by his own lights, walking in righteousness, until the risen Christ told him whom he had actually been persecuting — and that he had been kicking against the goads.

**A miracle.** A carpenter tells a fisherman who has worked all night to put the nets out again. Mark made the offense concrete: imagine an electrician strolling up while you are clearing a main line and suggesting a different cable. Peter does it anyway, the nets fill, and he is on his knees —

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” Power arrives and sin becomes visible in the same instant.

**A healing.** Two blind men call out, Jesus in pity touches their eyes, and they followed him — not for a few steps, Mark argued, but for good. Set against that, the ten lepers, of whom one came back. “That tells you that you can actually experience a touch of God and still reject him. That’s terrifying.” His remedy was the old one: set up Ebenezer stones, stones of remembrance. Tell the stories to your children and your friends, because rehearsing what God has done builds the faith back up.

He read A. W. Tozer quoting Horatio Bonar — a seared conscience is the sinner’s heritage, and it is the first thing the Spirit lays his hand on when he wakes a soul from its sleep of death. The struggles of conviction come; then he quiets the conscience by showing it Jesus and his cross, and gives it the taste of forgiveness.

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## 4. Two people who were given it

► 1:24:44

Mark told the story of Daryl Belarus — everyone at Hope Chapel knew him as Bear — who was a fixture in this church for a dozen years or more before he died. Long before that, Bear was the most recognizable man in Austin’s piercing and scarification world, and deep into practices meant to reach altered states. He was also on dialysis and needed kidneys, which is a place where a person finds out what he actually believes. He went outside at the hospital and bargained: give me kidneys and I will serve you the rest of my life. Instead the Holy Spirit fell on him. He ended up on his knees, weeping, born again on the spot — and the thing he said afterward is the reason the story was in the sermon: *it doesn’t matter if I get the kidneys. I’m forgiven.* The doctor came in the same day with kidneys. Six months later, with no discipleship and no church home yet, he had read the Bible cover to cover and was halfway through it again.

► 1:32:59

The second story was his wife’s, from about twenty-three years ago, and he got weepy telling it. She had been attending Hope Chapel roughly six weeks when Carlos Calderon said from this platform that you can come to Christ today, and you don’t have to do it in a church — you can do it at home, in your own bedroom. She shook her head, no. Mark called her that afternoon and asked what she had been thinking. “I was just thinking I wasn’t going to do that today.” She got off the phone angry, and then she started to pray, and small things began surfacing — hitting her brother when she was eight, stealing candy from a grocery store. She started crying and could not stop. What she told him the next day is what convinced him: for the first time in her life she understood that every sin she had committed was not only against a person, it was against God himself. She asked God to forgive her and to be her father,

was overwhelmed with peace, and fell asleep. “There’s no surer evidence of salvation,” Mark said, “than true conviction of sin and repentance.”

## 5. It does not stop at the door

► 1:34:49

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it... So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24–27 ↗

Everyone wants to become what God intends them to become; the enemy’s work is to convince you that in this particular area you never will. Mark put Simone Biles on the screen and asked what it costs to become the best gymnast who has ever lived. Not one correction. Ten thousand of them — being told, at ten years old, after your best attempt yet, how it could be done better. “Greatness requires constant reevaluation, or what Christians call repentance. You have to repent from doing it the wrong way and do it the right way over and over and over.” Then the sentence the message turns on: “Repentance is actually our secret weapon, but too often we leave it in our toolbox and we try to build our Christian lives without it.”

## 6. Seventy times seven, from the other side

► 1:38:12

We remember the number because we are asked to do the forgiving — seventy times seven. Mark asked the room to run it the other direction. If someone is forgiven that many times, someone has repented that many times. Compress it into a single day and it gets embarrassing fast — *you apologized for this two minutes ago* — and yes, forgiven again. That is not the system failing; that is what it looks like to live with an advocate with the Father. Outsiders find it offensive that you can sin and be forgiven, and Mark agreed the wrong posture exists — but the answer to abusing grace is not rationing it.

► 1:39:39

Which is why he re-read a verse most of us hear as a test:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Not *prove your love by performing* — hear it the way Jesus spoke to the woman in John 8. Come and spend time with me, love me more, and watch that thing you have been fighting fall away. He allowed the other reading too, the mornings you get up and obey because you love him and not because you feel like it. But the engine is love.

## 7. Sin grows in the dark

► 1:41:00

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

PROVERBS 28:13 ↗

The definition is built into the proverb: confess, *and* forsake. Mark named the trap he falls into himself — handling it privately between him and God, calling it settled, and then falling back into it. So he asked the room to think of specific names: who in your life can hear your darkest temptation? He was careful about how. He remembered college concerts of prayer where several hundred students would confess things in mixed company that would have been better handled otherwise, and he was blunt that he does not mean handshake confessions in the foyer on a Sunday morning. He means people who know you.

He set two passages beside it. The Lord to the church in Laodicea:

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.” And Paul, pleading three times over his thorn and hearing

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Confessing a struggle to a brother or sister is exactly that weakness, and it is what releases the strength to walk out of the sin.

► 1:44:18

His picture for concealment was the grade-school science experiment: keep a slice of bread damp, keep it in the closet, and come back to mold. Hidden sin does the same. Bring it into the light instead.

“This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all... But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 JOHN 1:5-9 ↗

Mark pressed on the word *light*. The first thing God ever spoke was “Let there be light”; the author of light is the one asking us to live in it. All of it comes to light eventually, so why not now, while there is forgiveness in it?

He closed with the question he wanted the church to sit with. What are the chances there is no darkness left in you? Slim, he said, and named himself first. So what if, instead of the pressure to have it together, we admitted we don't and started living transparently with each other — how would the body of Christ look, and how would the kingdom of darkness handle a church like that? Repentance, in the end, is a series of dyings, and there is a verse for that too:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

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**FOR FURTHER STUDY****SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Luke 15:7](#)
- [Acts 2:37–39](#)
- [Acts 5:31](#)
- [Acts 11:17–18](#)
- [John 8:11](#)
- [Acts 9:4–5](#)
- [Acts 26:14](#)
- [Luke 5:8](#)
- [Matthew 20:34](#)
- [Luke 17:11–19](#)
- [1 Corinthians 9:24–27](#)
- [Matthew 18:21–22](#)
- [1 John 2:1](#)
- [John 14:15](#)
- [Proverbs 28:13](#)
- [Revelation 3:19](#)
- [2 Corinthians 12:8–10](#)
- [1 John 1:5–9](#)
- [Genesis 1:3](#)
- [Luke 9:23](#)

**FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP**

1. Mark admitted he had something “whacked out” in his own thinking about repentance. What picture of it did you inherit, and where did it come from?
2. If repentance is agreeing with God about your sin, where are you currently disagreeing with him?
3. Mercy, a vision, a miracle, a healing — which of those has God used to bring you to conviction? What Ebenezer stone marks it, and who have you told?
4. Where have you tried to handle something privately with God, called it settled, and then found yourself back in it?
5. Name the person you could be honest with this week — and what would you need to say to them?

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

Mark Proper served as college pastor at Hope Chapel and has been, in Matt Ryniker’s introduction, a longtime mentor and friend since Matt was a student at UT. He and his wife came into this church more than twenty years ago through the Alpha course, and he speaks of Hope Chapel as home. He is fond of chasing a word back to its roots, and he preached this message saying plainly that he needed it himself.

**Watch the full message:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFptMX2fsbs&t=4067s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.