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"I Saw the Lord..." (Isaiah 6)

Study 6
Repentance
(Is. 6:5)

From time to time elected leaders and legislators will change their minds about an issue. This may lead to changing their support or opposition or to changing their votes. Occasionally a politician may even go so far as to change their party. Such changes may be due to political maneuvering or pressures, or it could result from a genuine change of convictions regarding the issue. Either way, motives are always questioned and, at least in politics, changing your mind is usually viewed as a negative thing. However, the Bible makes it clear that each one of us must change our minds about the biggest issues of all: God, our relationship with Him, and most important of all, our sin. This change of mind is what God's Word calls repentance. We see a great example of genuine repentance when we look at Isaiah's response to his vision of God's holiness and glory.

We have looked in detail at Isaiah's vision of God. Let us now turn our attention to Isaiah's response to that marvelous vision in Isaiah 6:5 –

*Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."*

When Isaiah got a glimpse of God's holiness, he became vividly aware of his own sinfulness before such a holy God. He expressed this awareness in powerful terms.

"Woe" is a passionate cry of grief or despair. It is a word used by Isaiah and many of the prophets to describe the cursed condition of people or nations because of their sin. They would proclaim a message of "woe" upon their hearers warning them of the coming judgement of God upon their wickedness. Isaiah realized he was cursed, that he was in a terrible plight because of his sinfulness.

"Ruined" is a powerful word meaning to be cut off, to perish, to be destroyed. He realized that he was sinful and under God's righteous wrath and judgment because of his sin. Perhaps he thought he was about to die because he had "seen the King, the Lord of hosts"!

Isaiah expressed his sin as that of "unclean lips". Why unclean lips? He was a prophet, a spokesman for God. When he saw God's true holiness he realized how completely unworthy he was to speak God's Word. He realized his sinful lips only revealed his sinful heart. Jesus taught *"...the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man"* (Matt. 15:18) Jesus taught even more plainly:

³⁴ ...For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. ³⁵ The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. ³⁶ But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.

³⁷ For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

These are fearful words as we consider how often around the capitol and politics the sinful attitudes of our hearts are expressed in our words to and about others.

Isaiah also realized he lived among a sinful people. It is significant he recognized his own sinfulness first before he saw the sinfulness of others. How often in the world of politics are we quick to point out the sins of others without recognizing or acknowledging our own sin. This does not mean we never speak out about social and moral evils. But recognizing and acknowledging our own sin first will dramatically affect how we go about it and how we come across.

What is Repentance?

We find in Isaiah's response an aspect of Christian faith and life not much talked about today – that of repentance. Repentance is a vital aspect of Christianity, necessary for salvation. The necessity of repentance was Jesus' first message, *"...The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). It was included in His final words to His disciples, *"...Repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in (My) name to all the nations..."* (Luke 24:46-47). Paul's message to unbelievers was *"God is now declaring that all people everywhere should repent"* (Acts 17:30). The word repentance literally means "a change of mind". In the biblical sense, it is a change of mind regarding God and regarding sin. J.C. Ryle described repentance as *"...A thorough change of man's natural heart upon the subject of sin"*.¹ Thomas Watson explained it as *"...A grace of God's Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed"*.² This is how C.H. Spurgeon described repentance: *"Repentance is a discovery of the evil of sin, a mourning that we have committed it, a resolution to forsake it. It is, in fact, a change of mind of a very deep and practical character, which makes the man love*

what once he hated, and hate what once he loved”.³ When Isaiah saw the Lord, there was an immediate change in his thinking and attitude toward God and towards his own sin.

In his classic work on repentance, J.C. Ryle⁴ made the following observations about repentance. These are certainly truths we can see in Isaiah’s repentance when he saw the Lord.

Repentance begins with a knowledge of sin. When Isaiah saw the holiness of God, he became intensely aware of his own sinfulness. This really means getting a greater and clearer vision of God and His holiness and what Christ did for us. When we understand this then we begin to see how sinful we are and how dreadful our sin is.

Let us never forget that the heinousness of sin lies not so much in the nature of the sin committed, as in the greatness of the Person sinned against.

*Valley of Vision*⁵

We are often quite knowledgeable and ready to point out the sins of others. This is about becoming knowledgeable of our own sin. As with Isaiah, God most often uses a revelation of Himself through His Word to bring us this knowledge and awareness of sin.

Repentance includes a sorrow for sin. Isaiah was clearly deeply sorrowful for his sin. This is sorrow, not for the consequences of our sin but for the fact that we have sinned against God and against Jesus Christ who suffered and died for us. It is the realization that it is our sin that caused Christ to go the cross. Paul described the sorrow over sin that comes with repentance:

For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.
2 Corinthians 7:10

Godly sorrow is our grief over the fact that we have sinned against a holy God and that we are under His wrath and condemnation. It is the heartache we experience when we realize it was our sin that led to Christ suffering and dying on the cross to pay the penalty for us. Worldly sorrow merely is sorrow over getting caught or sadness over the temporal consequences of sin. One pastor described it this way:

*“Yes, we should be weeping. We should be appalled, disgusted, shocked, and grieved in the depths of our hearts over our sin. All our sin is treason against God. Not just the prideful, lying, stealing, and lusting sins but sins of the tongue, sins of anxiousness, sins of bitterness, sins of partiality, sins of complacency, sins of jealousy, sins of impatience, and sins of arrogance. We should grieve over them all.”*⁴

Repentance produces confession of sin. Isaiah immediately confessed his sin to God. While this is primarily confession to God. It may also involve confession to others if we have sinned against them. This is the confession John described in his first letter: **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** (1 John 1:9)

Repentance leads to turning from sin. We see from the rest of Isaiah’s life and message that he clearly turned away from sin to follow God and His ways. This is the outward manifestation of the change that has taken place in our mind and heart. We flee sin. We take steps to get rid of sin and protect ourselves from it. It does not mean we are perfect or always successful, but it is our habit and pattern to seek to rid sin from our lives.

Repentance causes a deep hatred for sin. Isaiah’s hatred for sin, both his own and that of the nation of Judah is clearly reflected throughout the rest of the book. It reflects the change we should have in our thinking and attitude towards sin. We hate it. We hate what it does to the glory and name of Christ. We hate what it does in our own lives and the lives of others.

Conclusion

We see that with his repentance, Isaiah found cleansing and forgiveness for his sin. The Bible’s command for salvation is to **“repent and believe the gospel”**. We must recognize and acknowledge our sinfulness and turn in faith to Christ, believing in His suffering, death, and resurrection for us in order to have eternal life. If you have not repented and trusted Christ for salvation, God’s command is to do so today.

But repentance is not a one-time act at the time for salvation. It is the constant life-style of one who trusts Christ and seeks to follow Him. The first of Martin Luther’s famous 95 theses which helped ignite the reformation was this:

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” (Mt 4:17), He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

As believers, we must constantly seek a clearer vision of our holy God, a greater awareness of our own sin, and a constant repentance as we seek to follow and serve Him.

*Keep up your repentance until the last day of your life. There will always be sins to deplore, and infirmities to confess. Take them daily to the Lord Jesus Christ, and obtain from Him daily supplies of mercy and grace. Make confession daily to the great High Priest, and receive from Him daily forgiveness.*⁶

¹Ryle, J.C. *Repentance*. Kindle Edition. Loc. 32.

²Watson, Thomas (2011-08-25). *The Essential Works Of Thomas Watson* (Kindle Location 5879). GLH Publishing. Kindle Edition.

³Spurgeon, C.H. *Apostolic Exhortation*. Sermon 804. www.spurgeongems.org.

⁴Mulville, Jared. *We Should Be Weeping*.

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-should-be-weeping>

⁵Bennett, Arthur. *Valley of Vision*. Banner of Truth. Pg. 143.

⁶Ryle. Location 413

BIBLE STUDIES

Thursdays

8:00 House Government Org Conference Room (East Wing)

12:00 Noon Treasurer’s Conference Room (EB54)