

THE BIG IDEA: If man's repentance leads to shame, then God's repentance is our aim.

The Take-Off

Today we wrap up our 3 week look into the life of John the Baptist.

We've spent the last 2 weeks learning about the man (he was unique and so are we) and his mission (to play fullback and clear the way for Jesus).

This morning, we're going to finish it off by getting a grasp on John's message.

In all honesty, John's message is pretty simple and straightforward, and it's found in Luke 3:3 - "Repent."

If all of us thought the exact same things when we hear the word "repent" then this morning's message would be a breeze, right?

But we don't. In fact, if we did all think the same thing, it would more than likely be something along the lines of this (picture of angry preacher), right?

So this morning, I have only one goal, and it isn't necessarily to get you to repent.

My goal is to clear up the confusion between 2 types of repentance: man's and God's.

This morning we're just going to kind of compare and contrast man's message of repentance with God's so that we can leave here having a much clearer picture of what God means when the Bible speaks of repentance.

The reason that is so critical is that you'll read the word a lot in the Bible and hear it a lot in church (or at least you should).

So, let's make some quick comparisons and then we'll point out some qualities that can be seen in people who are regularly practicing repentance.

1. Man's repentance shows us how bad we are; God's repentance shows us how good God is
 - a. We've said this before, but the church has become an expert at telling people what they already know
 - b. You're a drunk. You're an addict. You're a rabbit killer. Whatever.
 - c. Man thinks that we need to be shown how bad we are in order to repent.
 - d. But God's plan is the opposite.
 - e. John 3:16-17 says that God's plan for repentance started with love.
 - f. He gave to save.
 - g. God knows that if we see how good He is, that will bring the change.

2. Man's repentance wants to make us better; God's repentance wants to make us new
 - a. This might sound a bit pop pschy-ish, but most of us are on board with being better
 - b. We may not sling terms like "behavior modification" around on a daily basis, but most of us want to lay our heads on our pillows tonight and know that we were better today than yesterday
 - c. And we absolutely want the people in our lives to be better
 - d. There's an old saying - "you reward what you want repeated" - and there's a lot of wisdom in that
 - e. So, there is a place for guys like Dr. Phil in the world, but let me press in on this just a little
 - f. Too often, we lump repentance in with this line of thinking
 - g. We'd like for the "bad" person to change, sure, but we'd at least like them to act better
 - h. But repentance isn't behavior modification. Repentance is total heart transformation.
 - i. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that we are new creations. Old things are gone. New things have come.
 - j. He makes us new, and that makes us better.
 - k. By changing who we are, we change what we do.
 - l. In Psalm 51:10 - David's famous psalm of repentance - he wrote "create IN me a clean HEART, O God, and renew a right SPIRIT WITHIN me."
 - m. Thank you, Lord, that you are making us new!

3. Man's repentance leads us to a 360; God's repentance leads us to a 180
 - a. We're not talking about awesome moves during the slam dunk contest, but rather direction.
 - b. 2 Corinthians 7:10 says that there are 2 types of sorrow - worldly and godly.
 - c. Godly sorrow leads to godly repentance and leads to salvation, but worldly sorrow leads to death.

- d. Now, according to Proverbs 14:12 we're all headed towards death already, right? Even the choices that we think are good are still made as we're walking towards death.
 - e. It sounds morbid, but the point here is that, because of sin, all of us are walking the wrong way: away from God and towards death.
 - f. So repentance - from God's point of view - is a 180 degree turn that changes the direction of your life.
 - g. But man's repentance is often a 180 for a moment (because we're trying so hard to be better, remember?) that is eventually followed by another 180.
 - h. And the 360 keeps us headed in the wrong direction.
4. Man's repentance feels like the end; God's repentance is just the beginning
 - a. So often we don't want to repent because it feels like we're losing, right?
 - b. We see all the things that we have to stop doing, and so it feels like the end.
 - c. "I repented, and that was the day my life was over! No more fun. No more beer. No more movies. Just prayer and reading the Bible in King James."
 - d. Who wants to repent now, right?!?
 - e. But it's a step toward the best part of your life.
 - f. Acts 3:19 says that when we repent, times of refreshing can come.
 - g. 1 John 1:9 says that when we repent, we are clean and pure - a fresh start!
 - h. Matthew 3:2-3 is the message that John preached: repent because the kingdom of God is near!
 - i. John the baptist was creating a favorable environment and making it easy for Jesus to enter into and operate in the lives of the people.
 - j. It isn't a closed door on your sin as much as it's an open door for Him.
 5. Man's repentance points people to hell; God's repentance points people to Jesus
 - a. We don't need to talk a lot about this because we've already touched on it.
 - b. Remember John 3:17 from earlier? God didn't send Jesus into the world to condemn it, but to save it!
 - c. Jesus didn't come carrying a big sign with big letters that read "I HATE YOU" and "REPENT! I'M HERE!"
 - d. That's an angry message that is best preached by angry preachers.
 - e. God's message pointed people to Jesus as the gift of a holy, loving Father who could give dead people life.
 - f. John 12:32 - speaking about the cross - Jesus said that when he was lifted up, he would draw men to himself
 - g. Any repentance that isn't grounded squarely on the fact that we see Jesus more than even our sin is a repentance that won't last. It'll be a 360, not a 180.
 - h. Psalm 51:4 - "Against you (God) and you ONLY have I sinned..."
 6. Man's repentance argues about truth; God's repentance talks about truth
 - a. We've all seen the finger pointing between 2 opposing side, haven't we?
 - b. And somehow lost in all the anger is a simple fact: man's repentance says the truth.
 - c. Romans 3:10 and 3:24 are true: we are all sinners
 - d. Romans 6:23 is true: we all deserve death
 - e. Hebrews 12:14 is true: without holiness, none of us will see God
 - f. Those anger-filled posters we see? They're actually pretty true.
 - g. But we hate them because it's hard to see Jesus in them, and God wants to talk to us about truth
 - h. He wants his church to talk about truth, have conversations instead of debates
 - i. In fact, he doesn't want us to say the truth without also showing the Truth (John 14:6 - that's JESUS!)
 - j. So Paul instructs us in Colossians 4:6 to always season our speech with salt and grace.
 - k. Again, in Ephesians 4:15, he tells us to speak the truth in love.
 - l. No arguments, just conversations, because angry arguments make this last observation even more apparent.
 7. Man's repentance hardens hearts; God's repentance softens hearts
 - a. This one is obvious. If I yell at you, you close yourself off from me. If I talk with you in love, you are far more likely to listen.
 - b. Romans 2:4 says that it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance, not the anger of God.

- c. Is he angry at sin? Absolutely! Is he picketing your with angry sings for everyone to see? No way, anymore than you would do that to your own kid.
- d. Story about Rich Wilkerson changing a D into a B and how his dad reacted.
- e. It's God's kindness - his gentle, loving approach in Jesus - that softens the hard heart.

The Landing

Obviously, after looking at the differences between man's form of repentance and God's form, we want to repent God's way, right?

Nothing good can come from man's repentance, so let's make God's repentance our goal.

If we wanted to make that statement our Big Idea, then we'd make it rhyme and it would go like this: **If man's repentance leads to shame, then God's repentance is our aim.**

And while the 7 comparisons we've made should help you determine which repentance you're leaning towards, let me end with 3 characteristics that John the Baptist said would be evident in our lives if we're truly living a repented life.

John had just finished preaching his repentance message for who know how many times now, and the crowd's response found in Luke 3:10 is probably a lot like ours is this morning: "What should we do?"

In fact, 3 different sets of people asked that same question, and here are the answers John gave: share what you have, don't cheat people and don't bully people.

And so, if we boil those down into 3 characteristics that should mark a repented life, they would be:

- GENEROSITY (Share what you have - Luke 3:11)
- HONESTY (Don't cheat people - Luke 3:13)
- HUMILITY (Don't bully people - Luke 3:14)

If I'm living in repentance before God, then you should be able to look at my life and say that you see those 3 characteristics increasing.

And if you've lived for any amount of time longer than 5 minutes, then you know that this isn't an automatic process, but rather something over time.

And maybe that's the biggest misunderstanding about repentance: man see it as an event, but God sees it as a lifestyle.

"SIN IS A CONDITION, NOT JUST A BEHAVIOR, SO TRUE REPENTANCE IS A LIFESTYLE, NOT JUST AN OCCASIONAL PRACTICE."

I'm not sure who first said that, but I read it and it was good.

So, in the words of John the Baptist, the 2nd greatest bearded man to walk the planet...

Repent! Repent often and repent God's way.

It will open the door for Jesus to come and operate in your life in a way that you have never known.

You will find yourself growing in generosity, honesty, and humility.

And others around you will be drawn to Jesus, and just like in John the Baptist's life, that has been - and always will be - our mission.