

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke**  
**Chapter 15- Luke 15:1-7**

264- The Son of Man Has Come to Seek and to Save  
That Which is Lost- Part 2

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November 16, 2014

## Luke 15:1-7

**1** Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.

**2** Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

**3** So He told them this parable, saying,

**4** "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?

**5** "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

**6** "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'

**7** "I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

To the Glory of God

Now we need to remember that the Parable of the ninety and nine that Jesus gives here is in direct response to the grumbling of the scribes and Pharisees at the end of verse 2 where they said,

**This man receives sinners and eats with them.**

And in their twisted logic- that statement meant that Jesus was *agreeing* with the sin and wicked decadence of the tax collectors, and

the other immoral people that were collectively called "sinners". You see, back in the first century- to eat with somebody was to give energetic approval of what they did and who they were- which is why Jesus rebuked these men in the previous Chapter and gave them the Parable of the dinner feast- where He told them to invite those who could never repay them.

And so here is Jesus- the Incarnate God- spending time with and eating with and mingling with those who were the worst people in the city- the lowest and most immoral people in the city. And we are trying to understand why.

And so we find that Jesus eats with them- *not* because He agrees with their sin- but because God has chosen to save some of them- even though they are the most vile people around- and Jesus has already promised to receive everyone who the Father gives to Him. Over in **John 6:37**- Jesus said:

**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.**

And in this one verse- we can see four things:

1. The Certainty of Sovereign Election- "**All that the Father gives Me...**"
2. The Power of the Effectual Call- "**...will come to Me...**"
3. The Assurance of Genuine Repentance- "**...and the one who comes to Me...**"
4. The Wonder of Christ's Love- "**...I will certainly not cast out.**"

You see, what is implied here in the middle of **John 6:37** is that the one who comes to Jesus must not simply come in the sense of physically coming- but he must come in the prescribed way that Jesus has been teaching all through His Ministry- broken and contrite and convinced by the Holy Spirit that he is a wicked sinner who needs Salvation and Mercy and Forgiveness and Righteousness. And Jesus said that when somebody comes to Him like that- He will receive them- regardless of how evil they have been- precisely because nobody can come to Jesus like that unless the Father has drawn him, and if God has drawn a soul to Christ- then Jesus will gladly receive him. Jesus said in **John 6:44**:

**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.**

No one “can” come to Jesus unless the Father draws him precisely because we lost people are dead and lifeless in their fallen condition. So if anybody does come to Jesus- Jesus will receive him because Jesus knows that regardless of how dirty they appear- God the Father has chosen him for Salvation.

And that is the way that everyone must come to Jesus for Salvation, or else they will go away empty. So we see it depends on what *kind* of sinner comes to Jesus.

And by that I do not mean which terrible sin they have committed, but whether or not God the Holy Spirit is moving upon them to *convict* them of their sin and bring to their mind their great need of a merciful Savior Who will forgive them and save them to the uttermost.

You see, some sinners come to Jesus very weary of the *penalty* of their sins- but they are not weary at all of the sins that bring about the penalty. These people *enjoy* their sin- they *relish* in their rebellion toward God- they have no desire at all to love and serve God- they simply do not wish to pay the price for their sin and rebellion. And so they earnestly seek a way to be relieved of the earthly and the visible and the tangible *penalties* of sin- but not from the sin itself.

But we must understand that that is *not* true repentance. That is simply a carnal and fleshly desire of self-preservation- to not want to hurt and to not want to be sad and to want what is best for themselves- regardless of what God has said. And this desire for self-preservation doesn't take the Power of the Holy Spirit- any lost person can have this, in fact, all lost sinners do.

Examples of this kind of earthly, sensual, carnal “repentance” that has no problem with sin- but seeks only to be relieved of the penalty of the sin and is not the product of the Holy Spirit would be the man whose marriage is on the rocks due to his adultery- who is agonizing over the impending divorce- but not over the adultery that *caused* the divorce or the unbridled lust that caused the adultery. Or the man who sits in jail and wishes to be set free- so very sorry that he was caught and so sorry that he had the wrong lawyer- but not the least bit sorrowful over the sin that put him in the jail to begin with. These sinners are very sorry- but they are not broken; they are hurt- but they

do not grieve over transgressing against God; they are wounded- deeply wounded- but not convicted of their sin. And if they are not truly convicted by God the Holy Spirit about transgressing against God- they will not truly repent and they will remain lost. And Jesus Himself shows us the two kinds of sinners in **Luke 15:7**:

**I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.**

Here we have one type of sinner who is genuinely convicted by a sovereign Act of God the Holy Spirit and they are broken and who repents, and we see another type of sinner who Jesus said,

**... need no repentance**

.. which doesn't mean that they don't need repentance- it simply means that they are consumed with the "self-righteousness" and "arrogance" and the supposed "goodness" of their own souls, and they are not truly convicted of their sins and they see no need to repent.

So a *broken* sinner is different from just an ordinary sinner. A *convicted* sinner is different from an ordinary sinner. And even though both of them are sinners and both of them may have committed terrible sins- one is chosen by God and the other isn't. One is being moved upon by God the Holy Spirit and the other isn't. One is going to hate his sin and turn from his sin, and the other isn't. One is being drawn by the Father and has been given the ability to hear the Call to repent and come to Jesus, and the other isn't. And one is going to be saved- regardless of the depth of his sin- and the other isn't.

A sinner who is grieving over his sin is much different than a sinner who is grieving that he got caught or that his luck ran out or that he had the wrong lawyer or got the bad breaks. A sinner who is convicted of his sin and realizes that he is fully deserving of God's Wrath is much different than a sinner who thinks he deserves a better life or a second chance because deep down he is a good man with a good heart.

Jesus spent time with the kind of sinners who were blessed to be deeply broken over their sins and He rebuked those who were not.

Jesus ate with the sinners who were granted the unspeakable blessing of being grieved over their separation from God, and He condemned those who were not. Jesus spent time with those who hungered and thirsted after Righteousness, and He had no time at all with those who loved this present evil world and were filled with its' pleasures.

So we must understand that being convicted of sin is the sovereign Work of God the Holy Spirit. Nobody under any circumstances can *create* conviction in themselves that is true and real and lasting. A human being can't work this up; we can't manufacture true Holy Spirit conviction- only God can give a sinful person conviction. Please turn with me to see what Jesus said about this from **John 16:5**:

**5 "But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?'**

**6 "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.**

**7 "But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.**

**8 "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;**

**9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;**

**10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me;**

**11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.**

And so when Jesus knew that a person was truly repentant- He recognized that this was because of the Work of God the Holy Spirit upon that person, and so Jesus had all the time in the world for them- even though their sins may have been great. He was never agreeing with their sins and He was never condoning what they were doing- but Jesus knew that *nobody* could ever be convicted of sin in the first place unless God had chosen them for Salvation, and so He spent time with them- not simply because they were poor but because they were given the gift of being "poor in spirit", and He ate with them- not because they were simply hungry- but because they were granted the blessing of being able to hunger and thirst after Righteousness. And Jesus knew that those who are like this are God's elect- regardless of the horror of their sin.

And both groups of sinners are in this room with Jesus on that day- the ones whom God had chosen and yet were very, very sinful, and the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes- who although clean on the outside- were worse sinners than the tax collectors.

And as Jesus looks around and sees the scribes and the Pharisees and the tax-collectors and the immoral sinners- He sees both groups. And the moment is hushed. And the Lord looks at each face. And He sees something glorious in some and something very terrible in others.

And as He teaches- He sees some faces begin to harden and narrow into a tight, resistant exclamation point of NO! *"NO! Nobody can talk like You talk, Jesus! We understand what You are saying and nobody can claim what You are claiming! You are telling us that You are God Almighty and that You are seeking and saving His lost sheep. You are saying that the Old Testament prophecy of Ezekiel 34 is being fulfilled in You where God said,"*

#### **Ezekiel 34:11-17**

**11 For thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.**

**12 "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.**

**13 "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land.**

**14 "I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.**

**15 "I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest," declares the Lord God.**

**16 "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.**

**17 "As for you, My flock, thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will judge between one sheep and another, between the rams and the male goats.**

So as Jesus looked at their faces- He knew that the Pharisees were saying to themselves, *"Jesus, You think that You are God's promised Messiah- the Savior. So You are saying that when You receive*

*sinner and they repent- they then become part of God's flock- because they're in fellowship with You! That God Almighty is seeking and saving them in and by and through You and rejoicing over them when they come to You- which is the same thing as coming to Him. So we know what You are getting at- and we think it's arrogance at best and blasphemy at worst."*

So that's what Jesus saw on the faces of the scribes and Pharisees. But Jesus saw another kind of face in those who were the worst of the sinners- the tax collectors and immoral people. In their faces- He saw hope and hunger. They were hoping that Jesus was the Messiah so He could forgive them, and they were hungry for that forgiveness and the Salvation that Jesus offered to those who believed.

Now keep in mind that Jesus has just been condemned. The Pharisees and scribes had grumbled and said,

**This man receives sinners and eats with them.**

*And Jesus had just answered them by saying, "When I do this- when I receive these sinners and eat with them- it is not that I am agreeing with their sin. I am acting as the Shepherd of the prophecy of Ezekiel 34, and I am seeking and finding a lost sheep. Because as bad as these people are- the Hand of God is on them to save them and to forgive them and to bring them into God's Family. And I will leave you- as the ninety and nine, and I will go to them to labor hard and long to seek for them and to save them because you don't think you have a need to repent and God has graced them with the blessing of knowing that they do."*

And these self-righteous hypocrites have just heard Jesus say that the joyful celebration of the shepherd in the Parable is a picture of the joyful celebration in Heaven over one of these repentant sinners- who is eating with Him.

And so on the least likely faces- Jesus sees the light of worship rising. And they are saying to themselves- *"We hear You, Jesus! God has opened our ears and we hear You! And God has opened our eyes and we see that You are the Love of God seeking and finding what belongs to God. You are the very Heart of God! You are the Arm of God reaching out. You are the Crook of the Shepherd's Staff in the*

*wilderness. And God has changed our hearts and we believe that You are the Shoulders of God where the sheep gets carried home!*

*And this meal right now, Jesus- where You are receiving us and eating with us- this is the beginning of that celebration, isn't it? And in Your receiving us at this meal right here and right now, Jesus- God Himself is receiving us into His Family. He is forgiving us and we trust in You for that! And in Your Joy, Jesus- we see what God is like. We understand based on what You just said that God Himself is happy that we have come to You for Mercy and Forgiveness and Salvation!"*

That is what Jesus saw in their faces. So there were two kinds of faces in that room on that day. And one group hated Jesus all the more while the other group brought joy to the Father's Heart because they had truly repented.

So which group are you in this morning? The group who saw no need to repent and remained lost- even though they looked cleaner than anybody else, or the group who were graced by God to be convicted of their sin, and who God had blessed to have eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to believe- even though they were the worst of the worst?

So the difference between the two groups in Jesus' Parable here is that the one would repent and the other ninety- nine would not. Now about 150 years ago- Charles Spurgeon defined repentance as:

“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.”

And more recently- J.I. Packer defined repentance as:

“Turning from as much as you know of your sin to give as much as you know of yourself to as much as you know of your God, and as our knowledge grows at these three points so our practice of repentance has to be enlarged.”

And about 264 years ago- Jonathan Edwards defined repentance as:

“Experiencing a change of mind that now sees God as true and beautiful and worthy of all our praise and all our obedience.”

Now according to Jesus here in this Parable- this turning from sin to embrace Christ as God's all-satisfying Manifestation—is necessary. It is a requirement. It is the difference between a sinner who is saved and a sinner who remains lost. So nobody is saved without truly repenting. Jesus says in **Luke 15:7**:

**I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more* joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.**

... so the joy in Heaven is not simply that Jesus sought the one sinner, or even that Jesus found the one sinner- but there is great joy in heaven because Jesus sought and found the one sinner, and the result was that the one sinner repented!

But as true as that is- it is also true that repentance is *not* a product of mere human intellect or the result of human will power or the manifestation of human desire. Repentance is a gift from God and it is God's aggressive initiative in Jesus that brings it about.

And that is one of the main things that I have tried to bring to your attention over the years- that Grace is not this dainty, tender, feminine characteristic- but is very powerful and very aggressive. And so genuine repentance is a Work of God's Grace.

And so repentance is in this Parable of the ninety and nine. And it is in the next Parable in **Luke 15:8-10** about the lost coin, and repentance is also in **Luke 15:11-32** in the Parable of the man who had two sons. And so what you have are three Parables in a row that are simply different ways of illustrating the very same Truth- that the difference between a sinner who repents and a sinner who does not repent is not in the depth of their own wickedness or in the depth of their human morality- but only that one group was chosen and empowered by God to repent and the other group was not.

So what we see at the table is Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them. And so Jesus is the seeking Heart of God going out after sinners and aggressively winning our repentance. So we *must* repent. And we must believe. And those two things are the only things that

distinguish between lost sinners who are saved and lost sinners who remain lost.

But the Good News about both repentance and faith is that God has not left us alone even in them. He has taken bold initiatives to reach us and to change us and to grant us repentance and give to us-saving faith. And my preaching this message this morning and you being here to hear it is one of the ways God is aggressively moving toward you to bring some of you to a place of repentance and faith. So this is no accident that you are here today as I preach this Message. God is here in this Word and is speaking to some here. And His Word is this:

Come to the table of the Lord in the wickedness of your sin and repent. Beg God to open your eyes and cry out to God for Grace to believe that the banquet of being with Jesus is more than worth the cost of following Jesus.

So the Divine Demand for us to repent is as basic as it gets in Jesus' Message. In other words- without the Command for us to repent- you have fundamentally altered Jesus' Message until it no longer even resembles what Jesus said. The Demand to repent is equally basic to, and almost synonymous with, the Command of **John 3:7**:

### **You must be born again**

And one of the challenges that every true preacher of the Gospel faces is to show that repentance all through Jesus' Ministry is *not* at first outward behavior- but is first and foremost- the inner change of mind and heart that will always, always, always give rise to a new God-centered, Christ-exalting behavior- that grows more distinct and more powerful day by day.

Now one of the main things to understand about repentance is that it is not something that we do one time and then we're finished. No, true genuine Biblical repentance is something that is *ongoing*- something that we practice *often* and that becomes a way of life to the believer. Because part of our growth in Grace, part of our progressive Sanctification is that- as we grow- we see sin in our lives more often and easier- and as we see that sin- we despise it and we struggle to turn

from it- with the very same passion and the very same determination and with the very same joy as we did initially.

So here are some thoughts to help make the meaning of repentance more plain:

**Matthew 4:17**

**From that time Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

**Luke 5:32**

**I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**

**Matthew 12:41**

**The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.**

**Luke 13:3&5**

**I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.**

The very first Demand of Jesus' public Ministry was "Repent." And He spoke this Command indiscriminately to everybody- regardless of their status in this life. And it was a Divine Call for a radical inward change toward God.

Now there are two things that show us that true Biblical repentance is an *internal* change of mind and heart rather than mere sorrow for sin's penalty or a mere improvement of behavior. First, the meaning of the Greek word behind the English "repent" (*metanoeo*) points in this direction. This Greek word has two parts:

- A. meta
- B. noeo

And the *second* part (*noeo*) refers to the mind and its thoughts and perceptions and dispositions and purposes. The first part (*meta*) is a prefix that regularly means: *movement or change*.<sup>1</sup> So the basic

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<sup>1</sup> For example *meta* is used as a prefix in the word *metabaino* (transfer or change from one place to another), *metaballo* (change one's way of thinking), *metago* (lead or move from one place to another), *metatithemi* (convey from one place to another, put in

meaning of repent is: *to experience a change of the mind's perceptions and dispositions and purposes.*

So right off the bat- we see that the very foundation of repentance is not how we *feel* but is based on what we know and what we believe and what we trust in. And this shows us why so much of repentance today is so shallow and so superficial and last so little time- because it is almost entirely disconnected from what we are being taught and what we learn and know to be true and what we believe- based on what we are being taught- rather than consumed by an emotion and impulse of our wayward and uncontrollable heart.

The other factor that points to this meaning of repent is the way **Luke 3:8** describes the relationship between repentance and new behavior. This verse says:

**Luke 3:8**  
**Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance...**

And then the Passage goes on to give concrete examples of the fruits:

**Luke 3:11b**  
**... The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.**

And this means that repenting is what happens *inside* of us first that always and in all cases to all people leads to open and visible and tangible fruits of new behavior. So repentance is not the new deeds themselves- but the inward change that is the catalyst that brings about the fruit of new deeds. So repentance is not *caused* by the transformation of behavior- but is proved by them.

So Jesus is demanding that we experience this inward change. Why? His answer is that we are sinners.

**Luke 5:32**  
**I have not come to call the righteous but *sinner*s to repentance**

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another place, transfer), *metamorphoo* (change in a manner visible to others, be transfigured), *metastrepho* (cause a change in state or condition, change, alter), *metaschematizo* (change the form of something, transform, change), etc.

So who should repent? Only sinners should repent. But how often should we repent? Only when we sin. What happens when we repent? We turn. We turn *away* from that sin and we turn *toward* Jesus Christ.

Now what was Jesus' view of sin? In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus describes the son's sin like this:

**Luke 15:13&30**

**He squandered his estate with loose living . . . [and] devoured [it] with prostitutes**

But when the prodigal repents he says,

**Luke 15:21b**

**... Father, I have sinned *against heaven* and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.**

Therefore, throwing your life away on loose living and prostitutes is not just *humanly* hurtful- it is an offense against heaven itself- which is just another way of saying that it is an offense against God. And so that's the essential nature of sin- all sin- it's a direct assault against God.

And we see this again in the way Jesus taught His disciples to pray. He said that they should pray,

**Luke 11:4**

**Forgive us our *sins*, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is *indebted* to us...**

Notice here that the sins that God forgives are compared to the sins that people commit against us, and those sins are called "*debts*". Therefore, Jesus' view of sin was that it dishonored God and put us in *debt* to restore the Divine Honor of God that we have defamed by our God-belittling behavior or attitudes.

And the Good News is that this debt is paid by Jesus Himself.

**Mark 10:45b**

**... the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**

But for us to *enjoy* that gift or *value* that gift or *show gratitude* for that gift- Jesus says we must repent.

So repenting means experiencing a change of mind that now sees God as true and beautiful and worthy of all our praise and all our obedience. And this change of mind also embraces Jesus in the same way. And we know this because Jesus said in **John 8:42b**:

**... If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God...**

... so seeing God with a new mind includes seeing Jesus with a new mind.

Now we must understand that no one is excluded from Jesus' Demand to repent. He made this clear when a group of people came to Him with news of two calamities. In **Luke 13:1-4**- people had been tragically killed by Pilate's massacre and by the fall of the tower of Siloam. And Jesus took this tragic occasion to warn even the bearers of the news:

**Luke 13:5**

**Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish**

... in other words, don't think calamities or tragedies mean that *some* people are sinners in need of repentance and others aren't. *Everybody* is a sinner and *everybody* needs to repent- even as *everybody* needs to be born again because:

**John 3:6a**

**That which is born of the flesh is [merely] flesh...**

... so all must repent because all are sinners. So when Jesus said,

**Luke 5:32**

**I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance**

... He did not mean that *some* people are good enough not to *need* repentance. He meant that some sinners are blinded to their own need and *think* they have no need while other sinners have been graced by

God to see their need and empowered to repent and have been set right with God. For example, the rich young ruler desired “**to justify himself**” (Luke 10:29) while “**the tax collector . . . beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ [and] went to his house justified [by God!]**” (Luke 18:13-14).

Therefore, we must understand that no human is excluded from the Divine Demand to repent- because all *need* repentance because all are sinners. And this need is urgent. Jesus said,

**Luke 13:5**  
**Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish**

So what did He mean by *perish*? He meant that the final Judgment of God would fall on those who do not repent.

**Matthew 12:41**  
**The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.**

Jesus, the Son of God, is warning people of the Judgment to come, and offering escape- but only if we will repent. And if we will not repent- Jesus has one word for us,

**Matthew 11:21**  
**Woe, to you**

And this is why His Demand for repentance is part of His central Message that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

**Mark 1:15**  
**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.**

The Gospel—the Good News—is that the Rule of God has arrived in Jesus in His First Coming to save repentant sinners before it arrives to damn unrepentant sinners at His Second Coming in Judgment. So the demand to repent is based on the gracious *offer* that is present to

forgive, and on the gracious *warning* that someday those who refuse the offer will perish in God's Judgment.

After He had risen from the dead Jesus made sure that His Apostles would continue the Call for repentance throughout the world. He said,

**Luke 24:46b-48**

**46 ... Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,**

**47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.**

**48 "You are witnesses of these things.**

So the Demand of Jesus to repent goes to all the nations. And it comes to us- whoever we are and wherever we are, and lays claim on us. This is the Demand of Jesus to every soul: *"Repent. Be changed deep within. Replace all God-dishonoring, Christ-belittling perceptions and dispositions and purposes with God-treasuring, Christ-exalting ones!"*

Now if there is a cloud of ambiguity that hovers around our understanding of repentance- it might have to do with how we understand faith today- because repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without having the other.

And so we're reminded of Martin Luther's introductory words that began the 95 Theses that were nailed to the door at Wittenberg that God used to ignite the Protestant Reformation:

"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance."

Our entire lives should be repentance? Well, in one sense, we understand what he means. We should *continually* be turning from sin toward Jesus. The one great business of the Christian life is, as the great Puritan, John Flavel puts it, to

"preserve our souls from sin and maintain sweet communion with God."

But our entire lives? Even if we sign off on this *theologically*-chances are that few of us make this the practical work of our Christian

existence, at least not explicitly. Few of us would answer, if asked to describe what it means to be a Christian, “*You repent all the time.*” Sure, we repent. When we sin — when we are *convicted* of our sin and we repent. But it’s probably a far cry from our “entire life.”

Yet Luther says that Jesus intends that our entire lives are to be about repentance. And he’s on to something. *So what do we do?*

My sense is that the measure of distance that we feel in Luther’s statement likely corresponds to how much we view the nature of faith as primarily *intellectual* rather than *affectional*. And by *affectional*- I do not mean *emotional*- I mean *affectional*- which has to do with our loves and desires and what brings us joy. So the danger of repentance is in it being too emotionally driven by the heart while the danger of faith is that it might be too intellectually driven by the mind.

In other words, we’ll never grasp repentance as an all-of-life ordeal so long as we see faith as merely being some “mental adherence to facts about Jesus”- even if we consciously agree that those facts are wonderful and glorious and true. And the reason is that we can hold a lot of different facts in our minds that co-exist together without the slightest bit of trouble. And if faith was only facts- if believing in Jesus meant theoretically agreeing with what God says about Himself- then we won’t necessarily sense any problem with theoretically agreeing with several other things at the same time.

Because we are fallen- we have the capacity to simultaneously hold Jesus as Treasure in our minds while we go out and dig for worldly treasures in the world. The word for this kind of Christianity is “*nominal*” (in name only).

My point is that mentally agreeing that Jesus is glorious- while living after the pleasures of this present evil world is like affirming the statement that “honey is sweet” while eating pickles. So while you might agree with that fact on paper- it still doesn’t stop you from eating other very bitter things.

We have the capacity to crunch on dill pickles without changing our minds about the honey. And we don’t necessarily feel like the pickles are something that we need to forgo in order to love the honey. And to even suggest that- would seem strange. So if faith is all in our heads- repentance will still be very vague.

So while repentance is mainly *intellectual*- Biblical faith is mainly *affectional*- and not mainly *intellectual*. Oh, faith is absolutely

informed by the agreement of facts about God in scripture- but true faith is not mainly intellectual.

And there are two Biblical passages stand out to support this. The first is **2Corinthians 4:4**. Concerning those who don't believe the Gospel- Paul writes,

**in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

And in his commentary on this verse- Jonathan Edwards said,

“Nothing can be more evident than that a saving belief of the gospel is here spoken of by the apostle as arising from the mind being enlightened to behold the divine glory of the things it exhibits.”

In other words, faith comes from seeing the *worthiness* of Jesus. Paul says that those who *do not* believe the Gospel *fail* to see Jesus for Who He really is. And so Edwards infers that those who *do* believe the Gospel *must* see Jesus for Who He is — or as Paul puts it,

believing is seeing **“the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”**

So true faith is *getting* the Glory of Jesus. It's when it clicks. It's when people see Him and say, “Yes!” And to a certain degree, the same goes for any trusting relationship. Trusting someone- which is the same thing as *believing* them- is intrinsically about the affections. We must see them- their intangible, aesthetic qualities- and then deem them worthy of our confidence. And that's one big reason why it hurts so bad if that trust doesn't pan out. Which is why you'll never hear a Country sob song about missing a math problem. Believing in Jesus is the heartfelt embrace of Jesus as worthy and glorious and enough.

The second standout passage is in the Gospel of **John 6:35**.

**Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.**

Notice the parallel construction. *Coming* to Jesus, or *believing* in Him, is described as *filling* a hunger and *satisfying* a thirst. And that is a much different picture than acing an exam. Jesus is pictured here as a 12 course Feast for our famished souls. He is seen as the bottomless Cup of cold water for our parched tongues. *And this says something about faith.* Jesus means for the deep longing at the very core of our humanity to be met and fully satisfied.

So the tireless search for satisfaction in things that are passing away has blistered our souls like the scorching sun in the dead of winter. We're stuck, without coats, without shade, unbroken wind chapping our faces, throats frozen dry. Our stomach is so empty our toenails are aching, whatever is left that we can feel. Our heads are pounding in pain, our senses completely disoriented, and then someone walks out and throws a heavy blanket over us.

And only God's elect get like this. I call this a "Holy Discontentment" we are hungry while others seem to be filled. We are thirsty while others seem to be just fine. We crave to be filled while the others seem to be content with not ever having and never getting. And that sense of hunger and thirst and discontentment with our lives and ourselves is God the Father drawing us to Jesus- Who is the Fountain of living water.

And so the Person who rescues us is Jesus- Who has come to seek and to save that which is lost. And the weary traveler will rejoice as God digs him out of the miry snowfall and leads him into His Own warm cabin. And at that point- God Himself becomes our warmth and our comfort and our safety, and while the deadly storm is just outside- Jesus promises that we'll never be cold again, and we will never be hungry again, and we will never be thirsty again. And so we stay there- with Him- to eat and drink and enjoy Him forever. And that is what it means to believe.

We so true belief doesn't simply agree with the qualities of the fire, and the coffee, and the toast- it allows us to indulge ourselves in them and rejoice in them. And with this kind of faith- hazy repentance dies and repentance becomes real and powerful and glorious.

So when Jesus says that if we believe in Him we'll never hunger or thirst again- He is saying that the option of eating and drinking elsewhere is over. We can stop searching. We may now rest. In fact, we *must* stop searching. And that means we repent. It means that our

sitting next to that fire and drinking that coffee and eating that toast is our saying that there's no other fire or coffee or toast like this in all the world. It is our saying that we're done looking for another shelter- and that we're sick and tired of getting stranded in the snow.

And that is something we will not say one time- but we will say it over and over and over again. And so in that sense- what Luther said will become real to us and our entire life will be one of repentance because our entire life has become a relentless pursuit of eating and drinking and enjoying Jesus Christ- and not this or that or anything else. And that's how genuine faith talks. This type of deep, affectional clinch of our souls. And it doesn't multitask. Just like Jesus said that we can't love God *and* mammon- not that we shouldn't but that we can't. We do not have the capacity or the power to love God and wealth at the same time, and so we must love one or the other.

So in that same way-you simply can't truly embrace Jesus and embrace anything else. And to embrace Jesus is to say that. To treasure Him is to make that clear. Because this is what faith is, and this is what repentance does. So I think Luther was right.

So Jesus is telling us that in spite of His Majesty and Holiness and universal Power and Greatness- God astonishingly cares for individual human beings one at a time. There was one sheep- one out of a hundred. So God has a universe to run and galaxies to uphold and atomic particles to manage and governments to rule in His Providence. And yet there is not much in all the Bible that says that all heaven rejoices over orbits of the stars or the rise of kings or a global women's conference in China. It's true that God takes pleasure in all that He does. But Jesus is clearly referring to something special in these parables. When one sinner repents- there is a special joy in heaven. So God cares for individuals one at a time. Will you rejoice in His Care today?

Amen. Let's pray.