

REVIVAL NEWS
From Revival Ministries Australia
P.O. Box 2718 BC TOOWOOMBA Q4350 Australia
Phone: 61-7-46130633; e-mail: rma@revivalministries.org.au
Website: www.revivalministries.org.au

REPENTANCE

Nicholas Jackson

We are in a season of experiencing a *“measure of revival”* **Ezra 9:8**. The King James Version says *“a little reviving”*. In this context we have been blessed to host a city-wide prayer gathering that has been attracting saints from all different “church” backgrounds to come together and pray. This has been wonderful and God has been visiting us in various and impactful ways. At one prayer gathering recently He was speaking to us about the need to pray for people and share with people the need to *repent*. We have noticed that in much prayer and preaching of the gospel in these days there is little mention of the need to *repent*. It is a timely message for us to strengthen this foundation of *repentance of dead works* (**Heb.6:1**) and explore the area of *repentance* in a fresh way.

TWO PICTURES OF REPENTANCE

1. Breaking up the fallow ground

God speaks through **Hosea** for us to *“Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek Yahweh, till He comes and rains righteousness on you”* **10:12**. *Fallow ground* is ground that is left uncultivated, left alone. This is a necessary aspect of farming to let land rest. However, when the ground lies fallow, anything grows, and the ground can become hard. It needs to be broken up to become useful again for what the farmer wants to grow. God is not primarily giving us a farming lesson. This is a picture of the necessity of *repentance* working in us to break up fallow ground of our hearts, to be ready *“to sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy”* **Hosea 10:12a**.

Preparing our hearts for His rain

There may be areas of our hearts that have been left uncultivated. There may be areas where we have our own habits, interests and there has not been much of God involved in that place of our life. It is time to *break up your fallow ground*. It is time to repent and change in areas we have kept to ourselves and let the Lord Jesus in to those places. It is time to hear the voice of God in every place in our hearts, not keeping back some loose areas of our lives for ourselves *“for it is time to seek Yahweh”* and He is preparing to *“come and rain righteousness on us”*. *Repentance* is seen in this verse as *breaking up your fallow ground*. This can be hard going, depending on how hard the soil of our hearts has become. But it is necessary to produce the harvest God is seeking!

2. Take out the stones

God spoke through **Isaiah** saying, **“Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway! Take out the stones, lift up a banner for the peoples!” 62:10.** God is calling us to **go through the gates.** Jesus does not want us outside but to enter into His city and His purposes! He is calling us to **prepare the way for the people!** Jesus wants us to pioneer and pattern the way for others to follow. So we can say, **“follow me just as I also follow Christ” (1 Cor.11:1).** He is calling us to **build up the highway!** Jesus wants us to establish the **“highway of holiness” (Is.35:8),** showing forth that life consecrated to His purposes. In order to do this, we must **“take out the stones”!** Stones stumble us. The stones of man’s religion, traditions, denominational beliefs and ways, must be **taken out of the way!** This is **repentance from dead religious works!**

Take the stumbling block out of the way

Isaiah says in another place, **Heap it up! Heap it up! Prepare the way, take the stumbling block out of the way of My people” 57:14.** These stones are stumbling blocks. They cause believers to stumble and not receive everything God for them. They block believers from experiencing the fullness of God! These stones are religious doctrines that cause people to doubt what is clearly written in the Word of God. They exalt man’s traditions and theologies above the authority of the Scriptures themselves, saying there are no more apostles today, no more miracles, no more gifts manifesting, no more speaking in tongues and so cause God’s people to stumble.

Take the stumbling block out of the way! Repent and **“let God be true but every man a liar!” (Rom.3:4) “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” Mark 9:42.** That is how seriously Jesus views these stumbling blocks! **Take them out of the way!**

Revival comes to the humble and contrite

We need a return to **repentance from dead works.** To change our mind and humble down. God promises, **“For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” Isaiah 57:15.** Revival comes to those who humble themselves and are contrite. Those who **“tremble at My word” (Is.66:2).**

REPENTANCE AND THE GOSPEL

The word **repent** in the New Testament is a Greek word *metanoeo* and it means: *to think differently or afterwards*, that is, *to reconsider* (Strong’s Gk. #3340). It can also mean: *to perceive afterwards* as the first part of the word *meta* means: *after*, implying ‘change’ and the second part *noeo* means: *to perceive, from ‘nous’ which is the ‘mind, the seat of moral reflection’.* This is a deep word. To **repent** means to reconsider and reflect upon your thinking and behaviour in such a way that you make a decision to think differently and change! It is thinking about something afterwards and making an informed decision to change your ways from that time on. We need to allow repentance to take place in our own and other people’s lives!

The prime place of repentance in the gospel

John the Baptist preached repentance as the necessary response to the kingdom of heaven coming among us, ***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”*** **Matthew 3:2**. Jesus preached the same message in **Matthew 4:17**. To enter and experience the kingdom of heaven it requires us *to think differently and to reconsider our life and conduct*. When Jesus sent out the twelve on mission it says, ***“So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them”*** **Mark 6:12-13**. What did the twelve preach? ***That people should repent!*** This is the right response to hearing the message of the kingdom of God. The result was that many were set free from demons and anointed and healed.

Repentance and the Commission

The last recorded words of Jesus in **Luke’s** gospel involve Jesus’ final commands and instructions and we very often call it “the Commission”. Jesus said, ***“Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”*** **Luke 24:46-47**. The simple message of the gospel is to preach Christ for who He is and what He did according to the Scriptures and then to preach that people should ***repent*** in response to the message and receive ***remission of sins in His name***.

Peter obeyed the Commission

Peter did this obediently on the day of Pentecost by preaching Christ powerfully, showing that ***“God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ”*** **Acts 2:36**. The people wanted to know what to do with this awesome revelation (**Acts 2:37**). Peter told them, ***“Repent, and let every one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”*** **Acts 2:38**. The response to the gospel is not “to come as you are” or “to raise your hand”. The response is to ***repent and be baptised***. Change your mind, reconsider your beliefs and ways, think differently about who you think Jesus is and what He has done, and decide to put your trust in Him, be baptised in His name and have your sins remitted!

God grants repentance

Repentance is a gift from God. It is a wonderful gift. It is the ability to change. Peter said, ***“Him [Jesus] God has exalted to His right-hand Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sin”*** **Acts 5:31**. God gives repentance to us so that our sins can be forgiven. Paul told Timothy that as servants of the Lord we must ***“not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth”*** **2 Timothy 2:24-25**. Our conduct and handling of the truth can open the door for others to repent and come to know the truth. But it is God who ***grants repentance***. So let us turn to prayer for those who are in opposition to the gospel, that God would grant them repentance and forgiveness of sins ***so that they may know the truth!***

God commands everyone to repent

Repentance is not just a good thing to do. It is a command. We must repent. ***“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world” Acts 17:30-31.*** In view of impending judgement it is incumbent upon us all to be willing to change, to think differently and morally reflect on our ways. When some Jews were thinking that possibly terrible judgement came on certain people because they were ***“worse sinners”***, Jesus reminded them all to stay sober saying, ***“unless you repent you will all likewise perish” Luke 13:3-5.*** God commands all of us to repent!

Repentance and faith - foundations of our life in Christ

The writer to the **Hebrews** said he wanted to ***“leave the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ...not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God” Hebrews 6:1.*** Repentance is not something you do once! It is a foundational principle of our life in Christ, ***an elementary principle of Christ.*** We live a repentant lifestyle now, always willing to change our mind, attitudes and behaviours as we are convicted by the truth of the Word and by the Spirit of God. It is necessary to stay out of the trap of ***dead works.*** In the context these are dead religious works; trying to please God by keeping certain traditions, practices, orders of service and through adhering to denominational regulations and doctrines. We must repent from these and turn to ***faith towards God.*** Paul as an apostle taught this everywhere he went, ***“testifying to Jews and to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” Acts 20:22.*** Are you laying these foundations and establishing them in the saints everywhere you go?

Fruit of Repentance

Repentance has an outworking. There is a real change. Some believers think repentance is feeling sorry for your sin. I have met people who seem to feel sorry for their sin but still do not change – they do not repent! Paul commended the Corinthians, ***“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner...for godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death” 2 Corinthians 7:9-10.*** It is not enough to feel sorry. There needs to be a decision to change. John the Baptist preached, ***“Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance” Matthew 3:8.*** Apostle Paul also declared ***“that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” Acts 26:20.*** If we are to be sustained in revival, this foundation of repentance must be working in our lives. Repentance is a decision to change due to thinking it through. There will be fruit; a changed life of faith toward God!

REPENTANCE IN THE CHURCH

Leaving the first love

The church at Ephesus had many commendable attributes. They were hard-working, displayed endurance, strong concerning the truth, hating evil, ***“laboured for My name’s sake and have not become weary” Revelation 2:2-3.*** These saints were doing much for Jesus and were not getting tired. They had a zeal for the truth but Jesus still had a major problem with them, ***“you have left your first love. Remember from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works” Revelation 2:4-5.*** The word ***“left”*** means they *forsook* their first love. They

were working hard for Jesus, but not in relationship with Jesus. They had a zeal for the cause of the gospel, but left the primary thing, intimacy and relationship with Jesus.

Repent and do the first works

This is a warning to all of us. Jesus told them to *repent and do the first works*. We have seen the “*first works*” as a return to functioning in the first works of the early church, namely, “*in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers*” Acts 2:42. But remember it is firstly *repent* and then *do the first works*. The repentance is *to reconsider*, to “*remember from where you have fallen*”. So remember when you did the *first works* out of a loving devotion and relationship with Jesus. Remember it is not a list of works to tick off the religious “to do” list. Those first works are an outworking of our relationship with Jesus:

- *the apostles’ doctrine* – listening for the word of God coming through the reading, teaching and preaching of His Word
- *fellowship* – listening for what Jesus is saying through the saints and expressing His love to each other
- *breaking of bread* – communing with and having revelation of Jesus at His Table
- *prayers* – dialoguing with God as we pray together and get His direction

The reward of repentance

It was such a serious rebuke from Jesus that He warned that He would “*remove your lampstand from its place – unless you repent*” Revelation 2:5b. But the reward of repentance and coming back to the first works out of love for Jesus was, “*I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God*” 2:7. Repentance is from *dead works*. It seems Jesus was implying that the church in Ephesus was eating from the wrong tree. They had started being religious in their zeal for the gospel and began eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Repentance would lead them back to trust, reliance and love for Jesus, eating from the *tree of life* and experiencing the *Paradise of God*.

Be zealous and repent

Jesus also spoke to the Church in Laodicea about many issues concerning their superficial attitude to the gospel and thinking their carnal wealth meant they were blessed by God, “*I...have need of nothing*” Revelation 3:17a. Their spiritual condition was atrocious, “*wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked*” v.17b. Jesus comforted them in His harsh criticism, “*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*” v.19. As believers we are all growing and we, even corporately, can easily go off track. Praise God that He loves us so much that He will confront us and rebuke us when we need it. Because we are on a journey of growth we must always be willing to *repent*. We are to carry a repentant attitude, willing to change and reconsider our ways and receive the correction that the Lord Jesus brings to us. This is the only way to stay in revival!

The reward

Jesus said to this church, *“I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me”* Revelation 3:20. Repentance is keeping a soft heart, listening to His voice and acting by *opening the door* of our hearts to Jesus. *“Today if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts”* Hebrews 3:15. Repentance is being willing to listen to the voice of the Spirit of God inside us, prompting, teaching and correcting us. Then being willing to make decisions based on what we hear. The result will be, *“I will grant to sit with Me on My Throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His Throne”* v.21. A repentant heart and lifestyle is worth it! You will end up experiencing being seated with Christ in heavenly places (Eph.2:6).

**To stay in revival we must strengthen the foundation of repentance in our lives.
Stay open to change. Let your fallow ground be broken up.
Allow the Lord Jesus to challenge, rebuke and correct your life and conduct.
It is time to seek Jesus until He rains righteousness on us!**

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