



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

ACTS 1 & 2

MAY 2022

GOSPEL REPENTANCE

To repent is to bring our minds in line with the reality that Jesus now is the Lord over all things and that He is the full and final hope of Israel and the world.

As a kid, I attended many “revival meetings” at our country church. For one week of the year, the focus was on evangelizing the unchurched and calling the saints to fuller commitment to Christ. *Repentance* was an often repeated word and meant turning from some particular sin or habit and “cleaning up” one’s life. I can remember different people approaching the steps to the platform that was donned as an altar and throwing cigarettes on it as an act of repentance. I didn’t smoke, but there were many other sins from which I could turn. Usually before the week was over, I turned

from some of them with promises to do better. That’s one way of defining repentance, but it robs a beautiful word of its true meaning.

The first sermon of the Christian era in Acts 2 gives us some foundational framework for both the message and the method of New Testament living. It is significant that the first sermon is a template for apostolic preaching and church practice. We would do well to follow the pattern for both preaching and practical living. Such concepts as repentance are clarified as the early church dis-

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covered the dynamic of embracing a whole new reality, thereby leaving behind as obsolete the former concepts of who God is and what He wants of us.

The book of Acts begins with the followers of Jesus tarrying in Jerusalem as Jesus had told them. They gathered together to celebrate the feast of Pentecost. This feast was celebrated fifty days after Passover and commemorated the Torah being given to Moses by God in the desert. However, at this particular Pentecost, there was a new giving of the word of God to His people. As they gathered, tongues of fire set upon their heads, a sound of strong wind was obvious, people spoke in various languages to the hearers so that all heard the essence of the gospel. This phenomenon was shocking to all. Trying to make sense of it, some of the Jewish leaders accused the people of being drunk. The apostle Peter stood up and interpreted the events in light of the narrative of the Bible (see Acts 2:14-41). This is true apostolic

preaching. He declared that what they were witnessing had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier when Joel spoke of the coming day of the Lord. The relationship between the old era and the new was being clarified. The new is the fulfillment of the old. Peter went on to interpret the events since Jesus came to the world. He even declared that Almighty God had used the wickedness of the blind Jewish leaders, the hubris of Roman authority, and the ignorance of the people to bring about the fulfillment of His eternal plan of the new creation. They crucified Jesus thinking they were dealing with just another criminal. In fact, they were actors in the greatest drama of all the ages. Their sins did not prevent God from doing what he had purposed to do.

Peter explains the crucifixion and resurrection in light of Israel's hope of vindication. The Jews had looked forward to the day when a new king would take over. He would be a son of the great King David. Peter explains how the

promises made to David were really about Jesus, the ultimate son of the earlier David who was buried and still in the tomb. Unlike the first David, the new David was raised from the dead and ascended to the throne. He has been established as the Lord over all of God's creation. He is also the Christ who is the hope of Israel. It is interesting that Peter's sermon features declaring who Jesus is, where He is, what He has done, and how He has fulfilled the previous promises. (Again, this is true apostolic preaching.) Upon Peter's confident declaration that God has acted in history and made Jesus both Christ and Lord, the people responded accordingly: "What must we do?" Of course they wanted to know what to do! Humanity has always been looking for what we must do to safely relate to God. It is worthy to note that Peter had not yet told the crowd anything to do. He was simply announcing what God had already done. It was when the congregation heard of what God had done that they were ready for instruction.

Peter's answer was shocking: "Repent." To repent is to bring my mind in line with the reality that Jesus now is the Lord over all things and that He is the full and final hope of Israel and the world. When I believe that, I will start engaging in new actions. Other actions will be obsolete and futile. Life will change—not in order to get God to be favorable to me, but because the new reality demands it. Since He is the Lord of all authority, His word is final. Since He is the Christ, I will embrace His new covenant and be baptized (fully identified covenant-wise) in Jesus' name. My sins will be forgiven based on His sacrifice, not my worldly sorrow. The gift of the Holy Spirit is given, and not just if I pray enough or someone special lays hands on me. He is the gift who will make this a new reality in my life.

The implications are huge in my life. Since Jesus is the Lord and has the last word on everything, I want to know how to hear that word. I want to know how to in-

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interpret the book that explains His role in history and how I relate to it. No one will need to manipulate me to read the Bible, pray, and go to church meetings. I will be compelled to know the One who is now Lord. I will want to find my role in the body that He now indwells. I will want to know what other members of the body know and how love works in their lives. I will be eager to find ways to fulfill our family mission. I won't need someone prodding me to attend church meetings so that God will consider me sincere. I won't need guilt and shame to get me to do what normal people do who believe that Jesus is the final authority and that His word gives me life for daily living. Like the people of Pentecost, I will join those listening to apostolic doctrine, sharing life with those who have joined him, giving my resources to those who need basic care, and praising God even in the midst of a culture that is hostile to Jesus.

Sadly, too much time and energy has been spent trying to motivate confessing Christians to do religious activities and too little spent on announcing that a new creation has arrived and a new Lord rules over all. I can alter my behavior if motivated enough, but I can't repent unless I can hear/see the new reality. As I see Jesus as the center of life, the Lord of glory, the Christ of the Old Testament, and the star of God's story, I will find a way to know Him, love Him, trust Him, and that will affect my every thought and action. All over the world you will find true believers listening to the truth of who Jesus is, meeting with each other, serving each other, praying with each other, and praising God together. It is just what we do when we see that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ.



P.O. Box 2022
Colleyville, TX 76034
(817) 267-9224
Email: Contact@KerygmaVentures.com
www.KerygmaVentures.com