

## Repentance and Faith

Mark 1: 15, Ephesians 2: 8-9

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How many of you have a coin in your pocket or purse this morning? If you do, take it out and look it over. How many sides does it have? Is each side different or the same? The answer is obvious. Each coin has two sides and each side is different from the other and yet what you are holding in your hand is a single piece of United States currency. Would that coin be a valid form of currency if it only had a design on one side? I've checked and the answer is no. Here's the reason why. United States currency requires an imprinted image on both sides called the obverse and the reverse or in more colloquial usage "heads and tails." If it doesn't, it's not real. It's a counterfeit piece of money. Now why do you think I started this sermon with this rather obvious illustration about a coin? Here's the reason why. The fourth part of God's plan of salvation is like a coin. In order to be real, to be genuine, it must possess two things. Like a coin it must have two sides and this is what they are—repentance and faith. Otherwise what you possess is counterfeit. It's of no value. Like someone trying to steal a piece of candy from a vending machine with a false coin, it will not grant you access to God's salvation. In fact, this is what Jesus said at the beginning of His earthly ministry, "The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). In other words, if you want to enter the Kingdom of God, there are two things you need to possess. Failure to possess either one will deny you entrance.

So this morning let's take a look at why faith and repentance are such an important part of God's plan of salvation. But before we do, let's review what we have learned thus far. Here it is in a nutshell. God loves us, but sin has separated us from God and from His love for us. That is why He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into our world to save us. Christ and Christ alone can deliver us from our sins. So far, so good! God has provided a way for us to establish a relationship with Him that will last for a lifetime and for all eternity. What if anything should be our response? Quite simply all we have to do is say, "Yes. Yes, I want to be saved. Yes, I want my sins to be forgiven. Yes, I want to be a child of God and have a home in heaven for all of eternity." All we have to do is say "yes" to God and we do that in two distinctive ways. Remember the opening illustration about the coin. Our "yes" is like that coin. On the first side you'll find the word "**REPENTANCE**" inscribed upon it. On the reverse side you will find the word "**FAITH**" in great big bold letters. Let's take a look at each of these two words and see how they apply to us as we seek to understand God's plan of salvation for each and every one of us.

The word "repentance" means to turn around and head in a different direction, like a driver making a U-turn. One old-timey evangelist illustrated the meaning of repentance in this way. Coming down from the pulpit he started walking up the center aisle of the church towards the back doors. As he did he shouted, "I'm lost and going to hell. I'm lost and going to hell." Then he turned around and headed back down towards the pulpit shouting just as loudly, "I'm saved and going to heaven. I'm saved and going to heaven." Repentance is an about face in life. If we want to become a Christian, we must be willing to repent, to not only be sorry for our sins, but to earnestly desire to remove them from our lives. It's seeing them for what they really are, a blight, a cancer

that is destroying our lives. It involves a distaste for what we have been doing that compels us to flee from that which once attracted us and held us in its sway.

The story of an elderly man in one of the churches I have served vividly illustrates the meaning of repentance. Harry was an alcoholic. Having fought in the South Pacific during World War II, he returned home with haunting combat memories that drove him to drink, a habit that had become a major part of his life for decades. He was not a mean alcoholic. He never physically abused his wife or children. He just removed himself from their presence. At the family's request, I visited with him one day. We were sitting outside his old shed in the warm afternoon sunshine of a fall day. He listened politely as I spoke with him, but did not indicate that any change in his life would be forthcoming. I left thinking to myself, "This man is going to die an alcoholic and there's nothing I can do about it." Fortunately there was something God could do about it. One Sunday morning at the time of invitation at the end of the worship service, he came forward. I had not seen him at the back of the sanctuary. He professed Christ as his Savior and from that moment on never drank another drop of, beer, whiskey or other alcoholic beverage. With God's help he had turned away from a sin that had ruined his life and separated him from his family. Turning away and rejecting the sins of our past, disgusted at what they have wrought in our lives, is the first side of that salvation coin which we need to possess. As Peter said to the crowds which for the first time heard the good news of God's salvation on the day of Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).

Here's the second side of that salvation coin. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said, "For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is a gift which we receive when we place our trust and faith in Jesus Christ. It is a grace gift from the Lord. We don't earn it or deserve it. There is nothing we can do to gain it on our own. In fact, just the opposite is true. Let me share this illustration with you. A young person is swimming at one of our state parks in Virginia. The individual is swimming way beyond the safety zone. Realizing that this was a foolish thing to do, he also begins to realize that he is reaching the point of total exhaustion. With the remaining strength he possesses the distressed swimmer cries out for help. Gasping for air he frantically waves his arms splashing about, trying to get someone's attention. Seeing what's happening, the life guard on duty springs into action. He jumps into the water and swims out to the drowning swimmer. Arriving at the swimmer's side he tells him, "Stop trying to save yourself. Stop thrashing around in the water. Just relax and trust me. I'll carry you safely to shore."

Without a life guard, the swimmer would have drowned. Without trusting, having faith in, believing that the lifeguard could save him, the rescue would have been difficult if not impossible. In fact, when I took a life-saving course as a Boy Scout, I was told, "If a drowning victim keeps splashing around and won't listen to your instructions, knock them out before you pull them to shore. Otherwise they will drown both of you." Sometimes the same is true for those whom God is trying to save. They are so determined to do things in their own misguided way that God has to almost knock them out to get their attention. Remember Saint Paul? He was an obstinate, hard headed Jewish rabbi who wanted nothing to do with that new sect who called themselves followers of "the Way," an earlier name for Christians. In fact, he was one of the religious leaders who were persecuting them. Now he was on his way to the city of

Damascus in Syria. He had been sent to arrest the followers of Jesus who were living there. As you will remember, it was while he was on his way to this city, perhaps on the road crossing Mount Hermon, that the Lord got his attention. He literally knocked Paul off his horse with a burst of light that blinded him for three days. That and a word from the resurrected Jesus as to why Paul was persecuting Him and His followers, brought this Jewish rabbi to his senses. He became one of if not the most devoted follower of Christ in the first century.

Perhaps some of you may have had a similar experience. I have known of a number of God's people that the Lord had to almost bop them on the head and drag to the altar of repentance and faith before they were truly saved. Remember that coin illustration that we talked about? In order to be real and genuine, it must have something inscribed on both sides of it. With regards to salvation that something is **repentance** and **faith**. Without repentance and faith, we will not be found acceptable when we stand before the Lord in glory and we will not be the beneficiaries of His blessings here on earth.