

## The Gospel that moves us to repent

### 1. Intro

- We're starting the year with this series 'Delighting in the Lord'
  - The aim is to see afresh just how beautiful the good news of Jesus is for us who desperately need to be reconciled to God and have absolutely no power or means to do it ourselves
  
- Aim of this series is to have our hearts that have been melted by the grace of God to us in the gospel so that
  - Firstly, we repent and believe and so are saved.
  - But secondly, so that our hearts might continue to be transformed so that the grace of the gospel continues having an impact on your life, your thoughts, your actions, your joy
  
- When you read the Bible it is clear that God calls us to whole hearted devotion ... not some form of legalistic moralism that looks okay on the outside but is unmoved on the inside
  
- We started our series 'Delighting in the Lord' looking at the Gospel that shows us grace
  - And the point was ... we won't understand and appreciate the grace of God to us in Jesus until we appreciate
    - The holiness of God who is totally righteous calls us to worship him
    - The love of God who is unbelievably merciful and undeservedly forgives us
  - As we hold those two characteristics of God in tension ... then we begin to appreciate just how gracious God has been in reconciling us to himself through the death and resurrection of Jesus
  
- Then last week we looked at the Gospel that replaces our idols
  - Despite knowing and believing the gospel ... the reality is ... because we by nature sinful ... we continue to hold onto idols of the heart that we are unwilling to let go of
  - Bible talks about idols as things that you look to, to save you, to fulfill you, to give you hope, satisfaction and joy
  - Thomas Chalmers refers to them as 'affections of the heart'
  
- If we are ever going to flourish as a person and as a follower of Jesus ... we need to deal with these idols / affections of the heart ...

- Because if we don't ... we'll
  - be unwilling to let go of sin
  - won't have hearts that are fully devoted to God
  - always be dissatisfied as our earthly idols fail to give us the desires our heart that only God can
- In order to deal with our idols ... we simply can't stop adoring them
  - Reason is, we're made to worship ... so we will always worship something
  - If it's not God ... it will be something else
- Thomas Chalmers said ... "The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one"
  - In other words, we'll only let go of our idols or the affections of the heart ... if we can replace it with something bigger, better and more beautiful that we see and experience in God's grace to us in the gospel
  - As we 'delight in the Lord' and all he has done for us at the cross in Jesus ... we'll start to let go of our idols and turn our affections to Him
  - As that heart transformation begins to take place ... so our lives will begin to be transformed as well
- So one aspect of dealing idols is replacing them with a renewed love for Jesus who is truly able to meet the desires of our hearts
- But the second element ... which goes hand in hand with this ... is the need for deep repentance
  - And that's the topic we are looking at this morning
- Looking at three things today
  - Power of repentance > what's the motive and power for repenting
  - Process of repentance > what's it involve
  - Product of repentance > what blessings can we expect to see flowing from a repentant heart

## 2. Power of Repentance

- Going to focus 1 Thessalonians 1
- Thessalonica is a city in northern Greece
  - Apostle Paul visited the city on his second missionary journey > Acts 17
  - Remarkably ... he only spent three weeks there in the city proclaiming the gospel to both Jews and Greeks

- Acts 17:4 - *Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks*
- Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica because those who opposed his message tried to lynch him
  - So he left the city within weeks of arriving
- And when we turn to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians we see just how big a transformation the gospel had on the people of that city
- See in v7-8 that the good news of Jesus had had such a profound effect on them they had become a model to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia (Greece)
- In fact ... their lives had been transformed so much ... the news of their faith has spread like wildfire throughout the region - "their faith in God has become known everywhere"!
- In addition we see in v6 how they became imitators of Paul and Silas ... and of Jesus
- So what we see here is a bunch of Jews and Greeks
  - Some very religious, going to the Synagogue, following the Law
  - Others caught up in pagan worship of Greek and Roman gods
  - Yet ... both have been transformed
- Why? How?
  - What has brought about such a transformation?
  - Where's the power to bring about such a change in them that would be so significant that it would ring out across the region?
- Two things
- First is the message of the gospel that Paul, Silas & Timothy preached
  - v6 tells us it was the message of the gospel that they welcomed with joy
- And what is the gospel message they welcomed?
  - v10 - *that Jesus Christ is raised from the dead and who rescues us from the coming wrath*
- In other words ...
  - The Thessalonians have understood they're hearts had been turned against the Lord

- That all who do that will one day have to face to wrath and judgment of God
- But that God has provided a means of salvation
- That's the death of his Son Jesus Christ ...
  - Who not only went to the cross to die a sacrificial death in their place
  - But was raised from the dead to prove he truly did conquer sin and death and prove to the world he is the Son of God
- The Thessalonians understood their predicament
  - They understood that God is a holy God who is totally righteous and therefore they cannot wilfully continue to sin and turn their hearts against him ... also
  - They understood that God is a loving God who is amazingly merciful and will forgive those who turn back to him
  - In other words ... they understood God's grace
    - They were blown away that God would be so wonderfully generous to them ... despite deserving the complete opposite
- Firstly ... the power for repentance comes when we get the gospel of grace
- The second thing we see in this passage that gives power for repentance ... is the work of the HS
  - See it there in v5
    - *"because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction."*
- The human words expressing the gospel would've been useless had they not been accompanied by the power of the Spirit
- And so the power to repent comes
  - in being hearing the gospel of salvation that comes in Jesus Christ ...
  - and as the HS applies it to our hearts and convicts us of its truth

### 3. Process of Repentance

- So what does repentance look like?
  - What do you do?
  - Is there a ritual you need to follow?
  - A prayer to say
  - A priest to confess to?

- We actually get a great model given to us in the example of the Thessalonians in v9
  - *They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God*
- Here's what repentance looks like
  - You turn from idols ... and you turn to the living and true God
- **Turning from Idols**
- If we are going to turn from our idols we need to
  - recognise them
  - dismantle them
- **Recognise them**
- How do we recognise our idols?
- Touched on this last week
  - What do I fear losing the most?
  - What do I worry about most?
  - What makes me inordinately angry?
  - What do I rely on or comfort myself with when things go badly or get difficult?
  - Where does my mind go when I am free?
  - What makes me feel the most self worth?
  - What would really make me truly happy?
- It could be any number of things that have captured the affection of our hearts
  - career, family, success, a cause, material possessions, other people, physical attractiveness, romance, human approval, financial security, your place in a particular social circle or institution
- However, when we look deeper, there are often more profound desires of the heart we are seeking to meet in these other things ... rather than in Jesus
  - Desires such as control, power, comfort or approval
- If our repentance is going to be deep and transforming ... we need to also get to the deep desire of the heart we loving more than Jesus
- **Application**
- So if for example you
  - get excessively angry at your spouse for some reason

- constantly worrying about something
- reluctant to be generous with your money
- You can beat yourself up and tell yourself
  - It's wrong
  - I need to stop
  - I shouldn't do it
- And you might for a while
  - But there won't be any lasting change because you need to get to your idol that's driving your anger, worry or greed
  - Unless you and I are able
    - to dig deep and recognise the deep idol of the heart ...
    - identify the sin beneath the sin ...
    - We won't experience the transformation we so desperately desire
- Recognise the idol and get specific
  - In prayer, confess it
    - "Lord, I recognise I have this ongoing struggle with greed. But deep down you know the real issue is my desire to feel financially secure..."

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- ***Dismantling your idols***
- Just as God called on Israel to destroy their idols and shrines ... we're to turn away from them by dismantling the idols of our hearts
- How do you do that?
  - Unlike statues and shrines that Israel destroyed ... we can't physically dismantle the idols of hearts
  - What do we do?
- **Recognize how weak and poor they are**
- Recognise that your idol is useless in satisfying the desires of your heart
  - Marriage is not going to satisfy your desire for comfort
    - It doesn't automatically make life easier, in many respects it's harder
    - Sex and intimacy comes and goes depending on seasons, emotions and tiredness
    - Often doesn't live up to our romantic or sexual ideals
  - Beauty and body image will never satisfy your desire for approval because
    - not only is it impossible to defy the aging process
    - there will always be someone fitter, skinner, more beautiful, more muscles

- Money is never going to satisfy your desire for security
  - Money never guarantees you a secure in life ... just look at
    - Michael Schumacher > severely disabled after skiing accident
    - Glenn McGrath > lost wife to cancer when 38
  - When the share market tanks like it did in the GFC in 2008 ... your security goes down the tube
- **Recognize how dangerous they are to you**
- Recognise that idols enslave you and they will never be satisfied
  - Porn addiction often driven by a desire for comfort > but in reality it
    - leaves you lonely
    - destroys marriages
    - warps your idea of what good sex and good relationships are about
    - teaches you to objectify women and treat them objects for sexual gratification
  - Idolising beauty (approval)
    - Eating disorders
    - Depression when dissatisfied
    - Excessive time, money and effort, exercising, dieting, looking good, shopping
  - Idolising work / career (Power)
    - Workaholic
    - Absent parent / spouse
    - Spouse ignored > leads to marriage breakdowns and affairs
    - Treat staff like resources to achieve your goals not real people
- We think our idols are good and can satisfy us ... but they are dangerous and will destroy us
  - If anything threatens it, we will get inordinately angry, we will trample on people, break all the rules, do anything to maintain it
  - We cannot function emotionally without them, because they have become more foundational to our identity than Jesus
  - And when we lose them ... they leave us devastated because our identity and worth as a person is so dependent on them
- **Recognize how grievous they are to Christ**
- Idols ultimately are cruel to the heart of the one who offers us so much more than our idols ever can ... and at such infinite cost
- Realise that when you pine after idols (in your anger, fear, despondency) that you are saying

- "Lord, you are not enough. This is more beautiful, fulfilling, and sweet to my taste than you. You are negotiable, but this is not. Despite all you've done for me ... you are negotiable, but this is not.
- All this is a work of the Holy Spirit in a person that
  - not only convicts you of the truth of the gospel,
  - but also convicts you of your the idols of your heart and their failure to deliver what we desire
- Heart transformation and repentance begins when you see that your excessive worry or anger or shopping addiction or obsession with your hobby is not simply that you are selfish or have some bad habits
- Heart transformation and repentance begins when the Spirit shows you **why** you have the particular sins
  - It begins when you start to see
    - the inordinate desires driven by the idols of your heart and
    - how powerless and dangerous they are to you and
    - how offensive they are to the Lord ...
  - and we begin turning away from them
- **Turning to God**
- But turning away from idols is only half the solution
- As we saw with the Thessalonians ... we need to turn from one thing and turn to another
  - You cannot merely turn from your idols to nothing
  - There must be something you turn to ... otherwise we'll just replace one idol with another
- In turning away from idols we must turn **to** God
  - That is, we must make Jesus the new affection of our heart
  - He must be the one in whom we look to ... not just for our salvation ... but also for the desires of our heart
- To do that, we need to see how Jesus is bigger, better and more beautiful than the idol of our heart that we are otherwise looking to
  - Not just turn to God in dutiful obedience ... but actually rejoice in the grace of the gospel
  - Ponder God's goodness to you in Jesus ... and how he is the one who truly satisfies our deepest needs and desires



- That means applying the gospel to the particular idol of our hearts that we are turning away from ... so we can give our hearts a new affection for it to adore
- Examples
- If you're a workaholic and work is your idol because your worth and value is bound up in the affirmation of your peers / boss / spouse / friends ... what's driving that is our desire for approval
- What do you do?
- Remember ...
  - Turn from your idol > recognise it > dismantle it
  - Turn to God > rejoice in grace of the gospel and how much better it is
- Pray
  - *Lord, I know I work too hard and I have made an idol of my work. I know I deep down its because I crave the approval of others. I know my work is never going to satisfy my craving to feel valued and if I keep doing this it's going to destroy my faith, my marriage and my family. I'm sorry I look to my work rather than you to satisfy me. Help me to see with fresh eyes that its only your approval of me that matters and that you have shown me how much value I have in your sight by going to the cross to die for me.*
  - Write it out > pray it > meditate on it > keep praying it
- Could be any other idol driven by approval
  - Beauty or the affirmation or affection of your spouse
  - Peer pressure at school that compels you to follow the crowd > wear certain clothes > behave in particular ways
- We need to see that our true worth and value as a person is seen in being a child of God who dearly loves you ... who has proven his love for you at the cross
- Struggling with temptation of some kind such as pornography > what's driving that? Comfort / pleasure
- What do we do?
  - Turn from your idol > recognise it > dismantle it
  - Turn to God > rejoice in grace of the gospel and how much better it is
- Pray something like this
  - "Lord, I confess I am I trying to find comfort in fake love and false pleasure of porn. Why do I rake in a mud puddle when you have set a table for me filled with your love and joy? This temptation never satisfies and only leaves me feeling worse -- it's a sham and cheat and is ruining

me spiritually and relationally. Father help me to see that true pleasure comes from knowing you and being forgiven by you and true love is found, not on computer screens, but in Jesus sacrificial death for me, as his bride'

- What if you recognise your idol is power ... and it's revealing itself in the way you treat others around you - spouse, friends, kids, work colleagues
  - Treat them badly, impatient, rude, angered when they question / challenge you
- What do we do?
  - Turn from your idol > recognise it > dismantle it
  - Turn to God > rejoice in grace of the gospel and how much better it is
- Pray something like this
  - "Heavenly Father I recognise my rudeness, impatience and anger towards others is because of my desire to have power over others. I can see how hurtful I am being to others and how much damage I am doing to my relationships. I am sorry for failing to love others and honour you as I should. I thank you for Jesus who even though he had all the power in the universe he was willing to give that all up, humble himself and die for me; that despite of my failings, he was patient, kind and gracious to me. Help me to see true power is not in lording it over others but in humbling myself and serving graciously"
- Excessively anxious about kids? > control / security
  - *"Lord, I live by your sheer grace. That means I don't deserve to have things go right, yet I know you are working them all out for good because you love me in Christ. All my punishment fell into Jesus' heart—so you only allow bad things for my growth, and for loving wise purposes. I can relax, because my kids security in life is based neither on luck, nor my efforts, but on your gracious love for me. You have counted every hair on my kids and every tear down their cheeks. Remove my idols of security--which never can give me the security I need."*
- So you see what we are doing when we turn to God?
  - Not just bowing down dutifully to him ... although he is within his rights to command that of us
  - But falling at his feet in joy and humility as we comprehend just how much bigger, better and beautiful Jesus is compared to the idol of our heart we have been chasing

- You see how this is a much more radical repentance?
  - Without an orientation to the gospel ... repentance tends to focus on superficial behaviour
    - Anxiety, anger, greed, addiction,
    - And we say to ourselves
      - “I shouldn't do it ... It's a sin! ... I must stop it!”
- But the gospel helps you deal with the sin beneath my sin ... the real idol such as control, power, approval or comfort which is the thing we really need to repent of if we're going to experience real and lasting transformation of the heart
- Process of repentance
  - Turn from your idol > recognise it > dismantle it >
  - Turn to God > rejoice in grace of the gospel and how much better it is

#### 4. Product of repentance

- Product of turning from idols to God ... is that rejoicing in the goodness, glory and grace of God to us in Jesus ... actually goes hand in hand with repentance
  - Rejoicing and repentance must go together
  - Repentance without rejoicing will lead to despair
  - Rejoicing without repentance is shallow and will bring about change
- Without an orientation to the gospel, the heart will repent out of fear of consequences and especially fear of rejection—that is, “repent or you will be rejected.”
- But the gospel of grace leads you to repent because Jesus died for your sin so you would not be rejected
- When we repent out of fear of consequences, we're not really sorry for the sin, but for ourselves
  - Fear-based repentance (“I better change or God will get me”) is really self-pity and doesn't deal with the heart
  - In fear based repentance we don't learn to hate the sin for itself ... it doesn't lose its attractive power
  - We only learn to refrain from it for our own sake
- But when we're able to rejoice over Jesus sacrificial, suffering love for us
  - And see what it cost him to turn us from sin ...

- We learn to hate the sin for what it is in itself
  
- Fear-based repentance makes us hate ourselves
- Joy-based repentance makes us hate the sin
  - Legalistic repentance is convicted by punishment;
  - Gospel repentance becomes convicted by mercy.
  - Legalistic remorse says, "I broke God's rules,"
  - Real repentance says, "I broke God's heart."
  
- Second product of rejoicing in Christ ... is that it actually strengthens us to admit the worst about ourselves in repentance
  - When we know the grace of God to us in Jesus ... it frees us to repent of deep and ugly idols and sin that we're holding onto and are enslaving us
  - If we didn't think God was merciful ... we wouldn't bring it to him
  - But because he is ... we can actually start to admit the worst about ourselves ...
    - And as a result ... with the help of the Holy Spirit ... I'm able to do some serious heart surgery as I recognise my idols and begin to dismantle them
  - Because I know God's not going to condemn me or squash me
  - He's going to forgive me and give me something bigger, better and more beautiful to cling to in Jesus
  
- Product of deep repentance like this means we can actually begin to experience real transformation of the heart
- Because if all we are doing is repenting of surface level sins
  - Anger
  - Anxiety
  - Workholism > greed > porn addiction ...
- We're not really addressing the real issue of the heart
  
- But when we identify the deep idols of our hearts
  - Turn from those idols and turn to God
  - Can we expect to see a heart transformation that is real and lasting
    - Because we don't come to God repenting out of fear ...
    - We can come to him knowing ... he is a God of grace, who desires to give us so much more than our idols ever will
  
- As we practice deep repentance ... we will experience transformed lives
- And this is what we are looking at this next week

**PRAY**

*Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.*