

I. AM. CHANGED.

Series: Changed. Mind.
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Repentance, Lent
2 Cor 3:2-10

This is the 3rd Sunday of Lent. What is Lent? A forty-day period starting with Ash Wednesday that leads up to Easter. We take this time to reflect and retell the story of Jesus journey to the cross. His sacrifice, his suffering, his death and resurrection.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the central piece of our faith. And for generations, the early church focused mostly on this part of the year; Lent and Easter. Not Christmas or any other.

What this should do is not only awaken awareness but also invite us into repentance. And for ages, the practice of repentance in Lent was not just private and internal. It was very public.

Partly because repentance was not just about saying, I am sorry, as many have made it to be. It was a complete change in how we view things that then demanded a complete change in how we did things. Repentance is about changing how you think and, therefore, what you do and how you do what you do.

We cannot live a life of repentance that does not bear fruit. That does not change our lifestyle. This is what God considers fake fasting. He says this is honouring him with just our lips, paying him lip service.

In this season of Lent, we are focused on the truth that Jesus' sacrifice changed us. It did not just change the world, it did not just change history; it changed us. We are a new creation.

There is a guy called Paul. We read a lot from him when we pick the bible. And he wrote a ton of letters to encourage and correct and teach and bless the early church.

Here is what he writes,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

2 Cor 5:17

You see, God is changing the world He is making all things new. Because everything was once broken. God is making it all new and who is He starting with? You. For all those who are in Christ Jesus, you are a new creation. You are changed. You are not who you used to be.

And for Paul, this was so real and crucial because it was personal. You see, Paul meets Jesus when he was famously going by a different name, Saul. But it is not just the name that was different, his whole worldview of God and therefore his lifestyle too.

Paul thought differently about God and went about overseeing the torture and even murder of those who believed in Jesus. That was his number one job. And he was convinced that this is something He did for God.

This is why I keep saying that what we believe about God impacts what we do. If we claim to believe in something and it does not change or how we live, then there is a mismatch. This was the truth for Paul. What he believed about God caused him to act a certain way. In fact, he meets Jesus on the way to arrest more believers. Because what he believed influenced how he lived.

True faith, in anything, bears fruit. So if you wanna know what you believe, look at how you act.

So Jesus kept making this call, repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand. And this is not just feeling terrible and guilty about the bad things you have done and say sorry. No. It was about changing how you think because that will change how you do. This is what Lent is about.

So today we will talk about another thing that Jesus has changed about us.

Now that we are a new creation, what is one of the things that have changed? Our Minds We are changed, which means we have changed mind patterns. The way we think is and should be and will continue to be different if we are in Jesus.

Let us Pray.

So Jesus' main message was that the time for God's Kingdom and reign had come. And he often put it this way, '*Repent and believe, for the KOG is within your reach.*'. And being that this is Lent, I need to just let you know that in a nutshell, this is why Jesus was crucified.

Let me just paint the picture for us. The children of Israel were desperately waiting for freedom. They were politically, economically and spiritually oppressed. So they all awaited this one anointed person who would come from the line of David and free them.

For most of them, this would be a militaristic Kingdom and King. This Messiah or Christ or anointed one would lead them through liberation war like the one Kenya had against the British to restore self-rule.

For others, there was a unique spiritual aspect to all this that would actually start the reign of God on earth. This Christ would not just be King but would be God's son.

So this caused both political, and religious problems for Jesus.

The religious leaders killed him because they did not like his version of the message Kingdom of God. It shook the power structure they sat on. Because it spelt freedom to all they abused and oppressed spiritually.

The Political powers of Rome and Herod did not like him because He was bad for their politics. When you say Jesus is King, it meant that any other political leader did not have our allegiance. This was dangerous politics for Rome.

The powers of darkness did not like his message because it meant that spiritual oppression was over. Demonic attacks and oppression on both individuals and communities had been put on notice.

So what you see as Jesus leads towards the cross is this increasing resistance from religious, political and spiritual powers. Because of his message: the Kingdom of God had come. And he then invites everyday people to repent and believe this reality.

What this means was: because this is true, that the Kingdom of God is so close to you, change how you think. If you change how you think, it changes how you do.

If you are to become a new creation as God sees us, it has to start with a change in how you think about God and, therefore, about life.

I am inviting us to the reality that Jesus' death and resurrection was the completion of God's Kingdom come. And because of that, Jesus keeps inviting us to repent and believe: Change how you think about these things and believe that God is so near you. Salvation is near you, healing is near you, restoration is near you.

Actually, in Jesus words, God and his Kingdom is at hand, meaning within reach of your hand. Humour me for a second. Stretch out your hands. That is how close God is to you. That is what Jesus kept saying.

Guess what I think that is still the message for today. Because sadly, just like over 2000 years ago when Jesus walked the earth, human beings still need freedom from the same things.

Freedom from the power of sin and spiritual oppression: A few weeks ago, there was a story on social media of a great spiritual leader who had fallen so hard in sin. And boy, did it shake me. What that tells you is that humanity, even those we look up to, are still in need of freedom from the power of sin.

In the last few weeks, I have seen and heard of God powerfully freeing people from demonic oppression. Humanity is still in need of the knowledge that the Kingdom of God is at hand to free them from spiritual and demonic oppression.

Just like 2000 years ago, when Jesus walked the earth, people still need freedom from political, economic and human oppression. There is a big debate on constitutional change happening in Kenya right now. And one cannot help but see how much greed is on the driver's seat at the expense of Kenyans.

Freedom from religious oppression.

Humanity still needs to hear the message of the Kingdom of God being near. The message of the Kingdom is relevant today because people still need a messiah, the messiah.

Sadly some people are convinced that God is far from them. Just like some people of Israel believed that God had abandoned them, many in our generation have bought that lie.

In January, I sat next to someone who said something I have heard repeated so often: God does not move anymore like He used to.

What they mean is how some of you feel right here in this room. That God is far, that He has checked out, that he will not heal, that he will not save, that he will not forgive, that he just does not care.

Even worse, there is a growing movement of people who actually believe that there is no God at all. And some might be here. Some of you may even be flirting with the idea.

And these are patterns of thinking that then influence how we live. For these reasons the world still needs to hear the message: repent because God's Kingdom is so close to you.

The reason no one wants a conversation about sin is that we don't believe God is close to us. And if he does not care, why should we? So let us ignore conversations about sin or even change the labels of sin. There is no healthy fear of God. Why? Because of the patterns of thinking we have allowed.

So what would Jesus response to this be? Repent and believe for the Kingdom of God is at hand. This really means, change how you think about how close God is and let it change how you act. Because true-believing leads us to action.

People are suffering under the weight fo desperation and anxiety because many think God does not care or does not even exist or is far away from them. So they are out here fighting their demons and pain alone.

What would Jesus' response to that be? Repent and believe for the Kingdom of God is at hand. This really means, change how you think about how close God is and let it change how you act. Because true-believing leads us to action. Why? Because God is so close.

Jesus changed all that. In Him God is close enough. And this changes everything. That is the invitation God is making this Lent. Repent and believe that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Change how you think about these things and believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus changed you. You are a new creation.

God is changing the world and he started with you. And if this is so, it calls for changing the patterns of our minds. Changing our thinking patterns. We call them 'a train of thoughts' because they carry us somewhere. Sadly for some, to train-wreck.

Where have you believed that God is far from you? Which patterns of your mind are you being called to repent for because they reinforce the belief that God is far from you?

How do you identify them? Look at the product of your faith. Look at how you live? Our thought patterns produce faith, our faith produces fruit.

What fruit is the life you are living saying about your faith? And what is your faith saying about what you think about God? And so, where is God inviting you into repentance this Lent?

So if we start by changing how we think, how do we do that? By being intentional about the things we put our mind's focus on.

Here is how this guy Paul puts it,

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

2 Cor 3:2-10

He is saying, listen, you are saved because you have faith in Jesus and therefore the old you is dead and there is a new you in Jesus. What this calls from you is a deliberate choice to think about things differently.

So it is not the sex is not good but in a world that says all sex is fair game, you think differently.

It is not the desires are not good but in a world that says indulge yourself if it harms no one else, we have fed our evil desires at the expense of our souls. Sadly, when we think it does not harm anyone else it always sips out doesn't it?

It is not that owning the newest stuff is wrong, but how do you not make them idols? How do you think differently about all these?

So if we think that God is near us, how does impact how we think about all these things? But before you go, "Okay this is unattainable. How do we do that?". How do you remain sexually pure despite your previous exposure, despite an overly sexualised world? How do you not feed your desires when the marketing world is geared at making you think you can get anything you want? How do you not be greedy when all your competitors don't care how they act in the market? How do you beat anxiety and dark negative thought patterns when everything in the news looks so bleak?

This, my friends, is what discipleship is about. This is what it means to follow Jesus.

The cornerstone scripture for this series has been

Now, the “Lord” I’m referring to is the Holy Spirit, and wherever he is Lord, there is freedom.

We can all draw close to him with the veil removed from our faces. And with no veil, we all become like mirrors who brightly reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus. We are being transfigured into his very image as we move from one brighter level of glory to another. And this glorious transfiguration comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Discipleship is about obeying daily, over and over again. We give in to the daily, not ones in a season but the everyday leading of the Holy Spirit. That is how the transformation happens. Then we become the new creation God sees us to be. The new creation he is calling out of us.

It happens as we learn to practice the presence of God. As we learn to say “Come, Holy Spirit.” As we learn to obey each day. To obey when he calls us to pray for people, when calls us to believe, when calls us to trust him over our efforts and even when calls us to say no to our flesh and turn away from sin.

When we say the Holy Spirit is Lord, then fear is not, lust is not, my desires are not, my culture is not and neither are my politics. Not that these things will not be there, but I must daily chose to bow to Jesus over them. This is how transformation happens.

Lastly about what we think Paul again said something I want us to read,

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:8

He was also finishing his teaching just like I am finishing my talk today. So I wanna call the band back on stage.

If you have no idea how to train your mind and change your thinking patterns, slow down and take your thoughts through this little sieve.

Is it true, what you heard about someone, about yourself, is it true? If not, forget about it. Some of us are facing anxiety over thoughts that are not even true.

Is it noble, is it right, is it lovely? Even if you heard it in the news or from your favourite politician or comic. It might be juicy gossip but if it is not lovely, quit it.

Is it admirable or excellent? Can you present it before people who love and know you and want the best for you?

So how do you do this? There is an old saying: The eyes are the window to the soul. People have used it to mean if you look into someone’s eyes you will see right into who they are.

This is why you hear a lot of stuff like; I looked into his eyes and saw his soul, or just look into their eyes and you will know if she is lying. Good liars know this and they will look you dead in the eyes.

Aaah, that would be cool if it were true. I mean eyes say a lot about people but it surely does not give you a clue about their soul. If this were the case, then we would have fewer broken marriages. After all, we spend forever looking into each other's eyes when dating. We would have very few bad hires because we look into people's eyes during their interview and they still do you dirty.

I think it is more like what Jesus says

“The eyes are a lamp to the whole body, and if the eyes are healthy so will the body be”

Matthew 6:22

And I just wanna say, our senses are a light to our whole being. Smell, touch and especially hearing and seeing and tasting. What are you feeding your soul with through your eyes and ears, especially?

If you wanna take control of your mind, take control of what you spend your time reading and listening to. So I wanna tweak what Paul said and say: If you wanna put your mind on good things, keep your eyes and ears on things that are pure, true, lovely, admirable, noble and right.

What have you set your eyes on? If you are on Instagram all day long, and only seeing scripture on Sunday morning on this screen, that is shaping your thought patterns in a certain way. Nothing wrong with Instagram accounts per se, the question is what are you letting shape your mindset?

If you are listening to news of our broken politics all week long and only hearing God's word on Sunday morning that is shaping your thinking patterns. No wonder, every political cycle Christians still act weird. Because we are shaped by news media more than we are shaped by God's truth. And guess what? Bad news sells, that's what is mostly on the news.

If you are watching and listening to stuff that corrupts you sexually, financially, emotionally and morally it is what shapes your thinking patterns.

It does not matter how powerful the presence of God is in worship, you will fall into the same patterns of sin and desperation that have formed your thinking process and therefore your faith and therefore your action.

So on this third week of lent, Jesus' invitation is repent and believe that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Change your mind and believe because God is so close to you. So what mind patterns is God asking you to repent of?

If God is so close to you? What thought patterns of sin is God calling you away from and how do you start taking control of that? What patterns of defeatism and feeling that God does not care or is far from you is God calling you away from? How do you start taking control of that?

Let's Pray