

<b>Topic</b>	Coming Together Around God's Word
<b>Reference</b>	Nehemiah 9-10
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<b>Speaker</b>	Dr Peter Ng

So last week we had our brother Dave Adams speak to us about the Festival of Booths, where the joy of the Lord is your strength. And as they read the word of God, they respond in joy and today just a few weeks later on, we come to another part of the passage where there's also another response to the word of God. Word of God which is read has two responses; one is joy and the other one is actually sadness. If you look here

*Nehemiah 9:1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. 2 And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.*

So here's the time when they are actually caught together and it was a time of mourning, putting sackcloth. They're both uncomfortable, rough cloth on them to symbolize the grief about this committing of sins, putting the sand on their head.

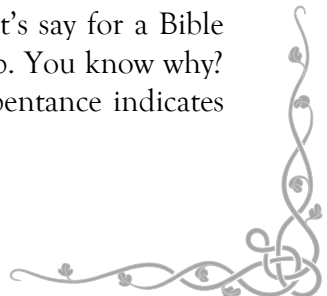
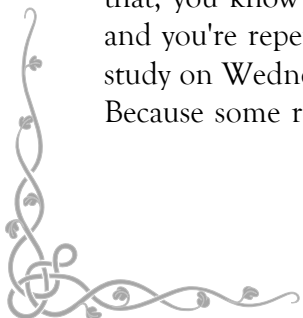
*Nehemiah 9:3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day;*

The young lady only read for 10 minutes and some people are shifting already, the read for quarter of the day.

*for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God*

So there is a dual response to God's word. On one hand there joy which was the Festival of Booths and now there is sadness and confession.

We started off with joy last week, today we talk about sadness, about repentance. One of the most common misunderstandings about repentance is that repentance only happens after the sinner's prayer. You first become a Christian, you realize you're a sinner, in dust and ashes and in tears you dissolve into repentance and then you don't have to repent after that. That's a common misunderstanding. The other misunderstanding that you repent after serious sin. If you strangle your mother-in-law or you kick the cat or something, then you have to repent because it's something really bad. And when you see somebody repenting in church, you get like what did you do? We always think that they must have done something very delicious for us to gossip about. That's another misunderstanding. The third misunderstanding is that, you know repentance means you're weak. As a Christian, you're a failure. You're Christian leader and you're repenting, ah, something's wrong with you. So therefore when we come, let's say for a Bible study on Wednesdays, everybody will stay for the talk, but nobody will stay for the group. You know why? Because some repentance may go on there, so you feel very uncomfortable because repentance indicates



that you are not perfect, that you are a sinner or something has happened, you're less than what you should be.

In fact a Christian life should be victorious. We should be Hallelujah all the time. We should be clapping, raising our hands, having miracles, raising the dead, that's what Christian life is about. In fact, there is a book by one of the pastors down south, "Destined to Reign". Paul Barker reviewed that and he looked at the title, "The Secret to Effortless Success, Wholeness and Victorious Living". So Christian life is recast as something victorious and something effortless. Wow! I don't know about you, my Christian life has not been effortless. All right? In fact, he writes that,

We must not preach the Ten Commandments because they kill (p121), and will lead believers to sickness and depression. In fact he claims not to support confession of our sins.

Is this what Christian life is about? Well, you go back a couple of hundred years to 15 hundreds to Martin Luther when he first hung up the 95 thesis on the doorposts of this university and the first of those thesis says,

**When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent'...He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance."**

So Martin Luther is the one that says, it's not the one off thing. Your whole life has to be one of repentance. Why? Well, Romans 8 tells you,

*Romans 7: 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

And if we have sin, therefore there must be repentance. And yet we go around life telling each other that my only time I repented was when I became a Christian, after that I don't have to repent, I'm okay, I'm bulletproof, and that's not true, isn't it?

So today we're going to look at the prayer of repentance or confession. I want to talk about the nature of repentance so that we understand. It is very easy for preacher like us to come up to and tell you to repent, but how do you actually go about doing it? Why is it so difficult? How do you actually overcome the difficulties? So that repentance, both joy and repentance can be two halves of the coin in our lives. It has to be. Our lives have this dual emphasis, so the nature of repentance if you look at the passage, we'll begin. So repentance:

1. Repentance begins with worship
2. Repentance is our response to His Goodness
3. Repentance is enabled by His Grace

## **REPENTANCE BEGINS WITH WORSHIP**

If you look here,

(ESV) 5 Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.<sup>6</sup> "You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you

So when you actually start to repent, the most counterintuitive thing is actually look at God and not look at your sin. That's very counterintuitive, isn't it? The first thing you do is actually worship and is looking at who God is. God is the almighty creator, He is the one who sustains us, He is the one which we should worship. Now Pope Francis said this

**Worship is stripping ourselves of our idols even the most hidden ones and choosing our Lord as the center ,as the highway of lives**

Why do you worship? Because a center of your life has shifted. All sin comes from the shifting of the center Pope Francis says. It is idolatry. Nehemiah 9

Nehemiah 9:18-19 (ESV) *Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies, 19 you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness.*

The first thing that happens when they get salvation, they worship idols. Hatta, Hebrew word for sin is basically missing the mark. Sin is an image problem. We are created to be in the image of God. That's the blueprint for our lives, but what is sin? Sin is aiming somewhere other than the center and that is not God. Soren Kierkegaard says

**Sin is building your identity on anything but God**

Tim Keller writes,

**"Sin is the despairing refusal to find your deepest identity in your relationship and service to God. Sin is seeking to become oneself, to get an identity, apart from him. ...So, according to the Bible, the primary way to define sin is not just the doing of bad things, but the making of good things into ultimate things."**

So behind sin is idolatry. And so then for the cure for that is actually worship. When you worship something bigger than yourself, look at what you do when you worship? When you worship, you're confronted by the holiness of God. Isaiah chapter 6, a very famous passage when Isaiah starts off his ministry, he looks and he's confronted by this huge vision of God.

Isaiah 6: 1 *In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"*

Isaiah 6: 4 *And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I said: “**Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!**”*

So the more we see God as glorious and Holy, the more we will sin as something to weep over. Repentance is less about feeling bad over behavior, and more about feeling awe and delight towards God. The more glimpses we have of the glory of God, the more we mourn for scorning that glory, and we see our sins in the light of that. Because otherwise we won't see sin because sin is deceptive. If you look at Adam and Eve sons, Cain and Abel. Cain had a less substandard kind of offering and he was very tempted, very angry with his brother. He is going to kill your brother. Just before that God talks to him.

Genesis 4: 6 *The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, **sin is crouching at the door.** Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”*

So sin is described metaphorically as crouching at the door. Sin is crouching because it wants to hide, so that you can't see it and then it pounces and that's the problem with sin in our lives. When we look at our lives, don't have much sin. I mean:

- they say i am impulsive, actually i am decisive.
- they say i am greedy, no i am ambitious.
- they say i am selfish, no i am disciplined.
- they say i am stingy, no i am a sharp businessman.
- they say i am vain, no i appreciate good grooming

I mean that's how we recast things. Why? Because when we look at sin, we look at ourselves. We don't look at God.

I came across this article where we look at messy people like I am and they say messy people are good. Messy people don't sweat the small stuff. That means all of you very tidy people; you only sweat all the small unimportant stuff, for us messy people big stuff is important. In fact if you look at the way we organize our lives, messy people have their own special organization system.

So again when we look at ourselves as the criteria we are not going to be in a good position. In fact, obedience is a matter of worship.

Nehemiah 9: 2 *And the Israelites **separated** themselves from **all foreigners** and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers*

Here you actually have confession of sin and they separated from the foreigners whom they are married. In fact we've got this funny idea of marriage that marriage is the most important thing. In fact, it's actually the second most important decision you make in your life. The first one is to accept Jesus as your Lord and savior. Second one is to marry that particular person, and in that most important decision, they had married people who weren't believers. And when they come to confession, they had to forsake that. In fact that actual command comes right down to us on in the new Testament. If you look in 2-Cor 6:14

2 Cor 6: 14 Do not be *unequally yoked with unbelievers*. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?

You belong to completely different camps, so how can young people putting love as number one start to marry somebody who has not the same beliefs.

16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty."

So as the Lord separate themselves to the people of Israel, the people of Israel separate themselves to Him. So marrying a non-Christian spouse or not is a matter of fidelity and worship. And when this actually comes out, it's not just marrying someone so that you'll be in heaven one day, you will find your soul mate. You both play the violin. That's not what marriage is about. You know why? Because in heaven will there be marriage? What did Jesus say? None. And there's a reason why there's no marriage in heaven. There's no marriage in heaven because marriage has a purpose and a purpose is on earth. When God said is not good for the man to be alone and they come together because the marriage between a man and a wife is a reflection between the love of Jesus Christ and the church. It's a paradigm for the world to look at, the beautiful love between a man and his wife and how they help each other grow and glorify God.

So when you die your marriage is fulfilled. The purposes for which God has brought you together, to disciple you together has been fulfilled. And in heaven, you worship before the unshielded glory of God forever and ever and ever. So that's what marriage is about and Nehemiah 10

Nehemiah 10:28-30 (ESV) *The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have **separated themselves from the peoples of the lands** to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, 29 join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes. 30 We will not **give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons***

This is what repentance is about. It is actually transformation so that you're obedient to God's laws.

## REPENTANCE IS OUR RESPONSE TO HIS GOODNESS

If you look in this entire passage, long passage you read,

- You're a God, Lord God who chose Abraham. Out of all the people in the world God chooses one man who basically a pagan at that time out of the land of Chaldeans gave him the name. Abraham,

- You gave him a covenant to give his offspring the land of Canaan. So out of one man he promises him the promise land.
- And then you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry.
- You saved them from Egypt,
- And then He saved them with wonders and signs and miracles.
- You divided the sea, by day there is a pillar of cloud, by night a pillar of fire
- Then you give them the right to write rules and true laws. You commanded them with laws and statutes and law given by Moses your servant.
- When they were in 40 years in the desert, manna and water

You see, he outlines every single good thing. The whole prayer is about the goodness of God. Why does he do that? Well, because when you actually come to repentance, it's not a good time. Whenever you come to sin, you get embarrassed. You feel like a failure, you feel worthless, and you feel hopeless because sin can either be seen as a failure of intimacy or a failure of performance. And the problem is most of us perceive sin as a failure of performance.

Matthew 4: 17 *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

The word repent in Greek is 'metanoia', which is basically a change in your mind. It's just a mind shift, a complete change and a mind shift that leads to a deep transformation of your life. In fact, the Catholics actually mistranslated 'metanoia' into a Latin, which actually means do penance. That's a big deal. There is a difference between changing your mind and doing penance. Doing penance means performing better. So if you've got repentance you either re-establish intimacy because you perceive this as an intimacy problem. We respond to love, or you try to improve your performance.

In the default mode when we talk about repentance is that, "Oh, I got to do better. My self-esteem is based on my performance". But actually repentance should be re-establishing intimacy, responding to God's love. So you've got Luke 18, the two men who come before God in the temple to pray. One of them, just falls before God and say I am a terrible sinner, you know why? He was a tax collector? There's no hope for tax collectors. And the other guy says, Oh, no, no, no, I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all I get. So he is performing. This guy is not performing. He's just falling before and saying I'm totally hopeless. The right response is this guy, not this guy.

If you look at Luke 18 and then 19 they're two parables almost side by side. One is a parable of the rich young man, the other man is a short tax collector. Ugly guy, you know. He is not the guy you want to invite to your house. Last guy, you'd invite in house. The first guy is what you want to invite your house. He's rich, he's a ruler. And he comes to Jesus Christ and it says, what must I do to inherit eternal life? See his perception of sin is performance. So what must I do to inherit eternal life? So Jesus plays with him a bit. Have you kept the commandments? He said, yes all of them.

Luke 18:22 *When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, **follow me***

The whole issue is what, follow me. This is chap who was going to do something, but he was not there to follow Jesus. The whole idea is not performance, the whole idea is a loss of intimacy. It is a person not the things that you do, and so he walks away. Then you've got Zacchaeus, a short man, unmistakably horribly evil. He's embezzled everybody's money. Jesus comes to town and because he's short, he can't see

Luke 19: 3 *And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature*

So all the people there Jesus pointed to him. I am coming to your house.

...v 6 *So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.*

These two stories are put side by side. Why does Jesus put these two stories side by side? Because it shows you on one hand performance and on the other hand, what is repentance? It's a relationship. It's a restoration of intimacy and Zacchaeus was accepted, the rich young man was not accepted. And then what we do is that we try to make up, we're like the Pharisees. We're proud of our morality. I'm very proud, I only marry one wife. I'm a very merciful person. I give a lot of money to the poor. I've got a good job and I've done very well, and that job that you've done very well becomes part of your own righteousness, or your financial ability, or your bank account, or some of you may think, because I've got all the right doctrine, I am Calvinist, I am a five point reform, all the rest of you are heretics, and that becomes your righteousness.

Now, when we talk about repentance, the Old Testament metaphors for repentance are all very painful. If you talk about Jeremiah 4:4, circumcision of the heart. What about plowing the land in Hosea? Hard ground being broken up. Metaphors for repentance are always painful. Repentance is actually a part of your Christian life because sin is part of it. The only way you grow is true repentance. If repentance is only the one time we become Christian and then nothing else happens then you would not have grown. In fact my children who are into bodybuilding telling me this, we go to the gym and then we exercise and if you actually exercise properly and exert the right amount of energy, you'll find for the next 48 hours you are going to have body ache everywhere. And I always thought body ache everywhere is a bad thing, actually is a good thing. You know why? Because as you exercise, you're going to cause micro tears in your muscle. And when you cause micro tears in muscle, the muscle repairs itself and it grows even bigger. So one day I am going to look like Arnold Schwarzenegger and I'm looking forward to that day, probably resurrection day.

That's the same thing. Unless we grow, we only grow through joy and we go through repentance and that has to be part of our daily workup. It has to cause pain. Sin is either failure of intimacy or failure of performance, and if you think it's a failure of performance then you have grief and your pain is due to the consequences. If you have real grief is Godly grief because there is loss of intimacy. So when you're upset because of sin, there are two things. You are either upset over the consequences of sin or you're upset over the fact that there's a loss of intimacy with God. 2-Cor 7:10 says

2 Cor 7: 10 *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

They both had the same unpleasant feeling, just like during the workout you get in pain. But one leads to repentance, one leads to death, and here you have the young man and Jesus says to the young man,

Luke 18: 22 *When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."* 23 *But when he heard these things, he **became very sad**, for he was extremely rich*

You know why? Because he was very rich that's why he became very-very sad, because he wouldn't follow Jesus. So what is his grief due to? His grief is due to consequences of his sin. He couldn't follow Jesus. And so that is not godly grief. I had a relative I stayed with at some stage in another country. He used to gamble and go to the races every Friday night, and whenever he won very good, full bag of Kentucky fried chicken buckets and everybody was happy at home and the wife and children are happy too. But when he lost his races, he would come back stinking drunk. He would abuse his wife, and everybody had to run away and hide, hide in the cupboard and all sorts of things. Next day he would be very apologetic and very upset. Why? Because. He got a terrible hangover, is suffering for the consequences of his drinking and the way he treated his family. But did he ever change? Never changed. Because if you only have grief over your consequences you don't often change.

Look at a two people here, Peter and Judas, both of them betrayed God. In fact, Peter was worse, he betrayed God three times, Judas did only one time. Here is the message by Eugene Peterson, how he translates,

Matt 27: 3 (MSG) Judas, the one who betrayed him, realized that Jesus was doomed. **Overcome with remorse**, he gave back the thirty silver coins to the high priests, 4 saying, "I've sinned. I've betrayed an innocent man.

Now, what's the deal with Judas? Judas was remorseful. Jesus was sad. The consequences of his sin is that an innocent man will die, but that's about it. That's where he stayed. Peter,

Matt 26: 75 *And he went out and **wept bitterly**.*

What happened to Peter? He repented and he became the main disciple that led the other 12 later on. Two expressions. One brings them closer to God. One brings them further away. Because we have to understand our sin in the light of who he is.

Psalm 51: 3 *For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me.* 4 ***Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.***

That difference between Peter and Judas is that Judas was all about performance. He was an honorable man. He had betrayed Jesus, an innocent man goes to die on the cross. Money is blood money; he is such a man of integrity. He gives the money back, but the guilt doesn't go away. Why? Because he's such a terrible person. He's a traitor and he cannot live with himself. So what does he do? He kills himself. That's how sin grabs you know, and you know why Judas killed himself? Probably Satan stand next to him



and tell him, haan, they call Satan the accuser, like that, how can you do that? God will never forgive you. You are never going to be used for the kingdom of God. That's exactly what Satan says. And Judas listened and Judas went and killed himself. Peter on the other hand wept. You know why? Just like David, David says, I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me, against you and you alone have I sinned. Which means it is a break in relationship. He perceived the sin in terms of a loss of intimacy with God or loss of a love relationship, a betrayal of the one that loves you. When you see sin in that light, then you repent. If you see sin as merely your lack of performance then you will kill yourself. In fact, if you look here

2 Samuel 12: 7 *Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul. 8 And I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. And if this were too little, I would add to you as much more. 9 Why have you **despised** the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight?"*

You see the sin is cast as a break in relationship. On one hand, it tells you what God has done for you, on the other hand how he has betrayed that good. So sin is seen as a loss of intimacy. Joseph tempted by Potiphar's wife. He might be thinking the wife wants to have sex with me, she's beautiful but I might get STDs. But Joseph never thought like that, he said

Gen 39 :9b *How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"*

He perceives the sin in terms of loss of intimate relationship. That's the secret to repentance, and so therefore all the goodness of God in the prayer, which the Nehemiah's group prayed, they are chosen, the promised land, saved from Egypt, miracles, law, whatever it is, is always cost in sharp relief against our sin. And you look in verse 25,

Nehemiah 9:25-26 (ESV) *And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness. 26 "Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies*

You see, goodness of God is always cast against a stark relief of your sin in order to bring you back from that sin. Why does God love them? Why does God put up these people? Well, if you look at Deuteronomy 7:6

Deut 7:6 *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is **because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers**, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt*

Why does God love you? The answer is actually a secular answer. God loves you because he loves you. Imagine your wife ask you a tricky question, darling why do you love me? If you ever say, "Oh, I love you because you're so nice and kind and you're absolutely beautiful, your 36 24 36 or something like that, big problem, because 20 years from now she will not be the same. The reason for which you love someone will then change and will your love change. The difference between divine love and human love is that divine love loves you because he loves you. So the correct answer to your wife when she ask you this question, I love your darling because I love you.

Here you actually have once a year, the high priest. Yom Kippur day, he will go before the Holy of Holies, offer sacrifice and on his breast plate will have 12 precious stones. The 12 precious stones represent the 12 tribes of Israel. Why is it precious stones? Because in God's eyes, you. are totally precious, just like those precious stones. You look at Exodus 19, Isaiah 43, exodus miracle, return of Babylonian exile. They are cast as God's special possession, God saves us both from exile from Egypt, as well as, in Babylon. Why? Because they are God's special people and Exodus 19 says,

Exodus 19:5 (ESV) *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;*

The word treasured possession in Hebrew is segullah, which means an example. If a king wants to travel to that country in order to show the other guy how rich you are, you can't take your whole bank account, you can't take all your gold there to show, you only take a token. So if I were the queen of England, I would take this my crown. Because it represents all of your riches, and that word is used for the people of God. In front of a God's eyes we are irreplaceably precious and beautiful. So you are the chosen race, a Royal priesthood, a Holy nation of people, irreplaceably precious to God. Why does he do that? Because it gives us the emotional strength to repent. Because when we sin, we lose self-esteem. It's a failure of performance. We're terrible people, so you dare not admit your sin, but if God tells you, you are precious. When the high priest comes into my presence, he wears the 12 precious jewels. When Jesus comes into the presence of God, he bears all of you with him and he looks at you and sees the righteousness of his son, and in that way you're able to repent. You know why? Because God loves you. You have the emotional capacity and strength to repent when you realize how precious you are to God.

This is the piece of the American constitution. It last transected for 9.8 million. There's a signature of Washington on that. It's only a piece of paper, it's probably moldy, it's going to fall apart, not really worth anything, right, but it's worth \$9.8 million because of the guy who signed it, George Washington, and we the people of God are like that. You look at us nothing big deal, all of us come in odd shape and sizes and yet beautiful because God has signed his name on us. He's bled on the cross for us, and that is why we can repent because of his love.

### **REPENTANCE IS ENABLED BY GRACE.**

If you look at the judges, there is a typical cycle of the history of Israel. You've got peace Israel, Israel does evil, God punishes Israel, Israel cries out to God, God raises up a judge, God delivers. And if you look in Nehemiah 9 exactly the same thing. You had blessing and the repay blessing with idolatry, you have got judgment, they cry out to God, God delivers them, five cycles of this verses 16 to 38. But there are two constants. Sin is constant.

Nehemiah 9:26 (ESV) *Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies.*

Sin is the consequence. The other consequence is God. God is gracious.

Nehemiah 9:17-18 (ESV) *But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.*

There is a reason why God shows us grace. Romans 2

Romans 2: 4 *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed*

So the reason why God describes time and time again about repentance, is because he wants to bring you back. But we misinterpret the sin. Sermon on the mount. You thought Jesus came in the world, he is all lovey-dovey and he is going to describe an easier way to God. And he goes to Sermon of the Mount and everybody's listening and then he says something strange,

- When you are angry is among, is the same thing as murder.
- When you look at another woman with lust, same thing as adultery,

Jesus never made the things easy, he wretched the pressure even higher. Then he says,

Matt 5: 29 *If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into*

Lastly he writes, you must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect. It is worse, your coffin is now sealed. If you read the Sermon on the Mount and understand that pointing out a sin is not the same as expecting you to do better next time, he is not expecting you to do better. The reason why he points with such graphic detail the difficulties of obeying the law is that he forces you to turn to a savior. Only Jesus can fulfill the law. You misinterpret or there was an early church father called Oregon who suffered with sexual impurity and he cut off his penis. It was written in the ecclesiastical history by Eusebius because he has so much trouble with sexual desire, so better go and do better by chopping it out.

Pointing out our sin exposes underlying idolatry and forces us to run to Christ. The whole purpose of the law is to point us to Christ, and repentance actually comes because of God.

2 Tim 2: 24 *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. **God may perhaps grant them repentance** leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

If you want to repent, you can't do it on your own. God has to grant you the ability to repent. It doesn't come from yourself. It is in response to grace. Here is Psalm 51

Psalm 51: 9 *Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.* 10 *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

See David doesn't say, I'm going to try better. He just says create in me a new heart, renew a right spirit,

Psalm 51:11 *Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.* 12 *Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit ....* 17 (ESV) *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*

So he doesn't come to God and say I am going to try and do better, I really stuffed up this time, I am going to do better next time. He doesn't do that. He comes to God and say, look I really messed up, I'm going to cry before you. And that comes because of grace. There was a story told in the New York subway, a social worker called Julio Diaz. He always stop one stop before his house in the subway so that you eat at a diner. And one day he was there and he was accosted by a young teenager who held a knife, threatened him and so therefore he gave up his wallet. And as the young man was walking away with his wallet, it just struck him, it was a very cold night. He said, since you're going to go out robbing a few people, you might as well take my coat, because it's very cold. The young man was totally surprised. Take your coat. So he took his coat and while he was walking away he said, you look a little hungry. Why don't I take you to dinner?

And the young man was totally surprised. You just robbed the guy and the guy wants to take you to dinner. So they went to the diner, which was his favorite diner in New York city, and everybody seemed to know him at this diner. The young man asked him, who are you here, do you own this place. He said, no no, I just here often. Then he started asking him about his purpose in life. The young man wouldn't answer. It was very cagey. At the end of the meal, the check came, Julio asked the young man, excuse me you got my wallet you know, if you don't mind, you give me my wallet back, I will pay the bill and give you back. So actually the young man gave the wallet back and he took \$20 from the wallet and gave it back to the young man. Here you just take this \$20 and you take this but I want something back in return. You know what I want? I want your knife. And a young man gave him the knife for the \$20, and you see that is what grace does.

When God forgives us, we'll take the \$20 and give back the knife because grace allows us the space and the emotional capacity to repent. Grace is how the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and allows us to repent and as we pray today, we're going to start off our New Year by having two aspects of our Christian life. It is not always victory, there is victory in repentance. Learning to respond with worship, learning to respond to God's goodness, repentance enabled by grace, that's why we are not going to come to God when we sin and castigate ourselves and pluck our hair and get all upset. We grieve over our sin, but that grieve has tenderness come to a reestablishment of intimacy. And the one that will stop us from doing this is the devil.

I want to end up with one last passage, you must go back and read, and this is Zachariah chapter 3 and then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing his right hand to accuse him. This is a vision, high priest Joshua, the best of the best of the best in the whole of Israel and yet standing next to Joshua is Satan, and what does Satan do all the time, accuse, accuse, accuse. He's probably telling Joshua, you're never going to amount to anything. You think you are a big shot, you are the High Priest, but I know what you did yesterday and I think God won't forgive you. You will never be used for the kingdom of God, call yourself a Christian high priest, some of you did that.

You see. Satan is always there to accuse us so we won't repent. In fact, we'll raise up the Drawbridge, circle the wagon, and defend ourselves. That's what we do, don't we? Why do we do that? Why are we afraid? Why are we hiding? Because Satan is there all the time accusing us. And when that happens, you know what we should do? We should read Zachariah because you know what God says in Zachariah and the Lord said to Satan, the Lord rebuke you, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is not this a brand plucked from fire.


You know what this means? A brand is some wooden piece thrown into the fire, burning, going to be in ashes and God reaches out his hands even though they get burnt, and he grabs that from the brink of disaster and he saves this smoldering broken piece of wood. He says, Joshua, you are like that? Totally worthless, but I put my hand out, I got burnt in the process and you are precious in my sight and Satan shut up. When we look at our lives, when we are afraid to repent, you can tell Satan shut up because God says we are brand pluck from the fire. We're supposed to die in hell. We're supposed to pay for every single one of our sins. And yet by the grace of God, he plucked us up. It is now precious. And they said now, Joshua was standing before the angel clothed in filthy garments and angel said to those who were standing before he removed the filthy garments from him and to him he said, behold, I've taken your iniquity away from you. I will clothe you with pure vestments and he said to them, let them put a clean turban on his head, and the clothing with garments and the angel of the Lord was standing by.

See the trick in repentance is understanding that you are a precious brand plucked out from the fire, and you are precious in God's sight, and that through repentance you will grow. And we don't let Satan condemn us, to stop us from repenting, to give us so much shame that we will never come and grow before God.

Let's end with the last song which actually expresses how we should deal with repentance. Not by trying harder, it actually encapsulates all that this passage says,

Lord, I come, I confess  
 Bowing here I find my rest  
 Without You I fall apart  
 You're the One that guides my heart

Lord, I need You, oh, I need You  
 Every hour I need You  
 My one defense, my righteousness  
 Oh God, how I need You

A decorative grey vine with leaves and a circular knot at the top-left corner.

Where sin runs deep Your grace is more  
Where grace is found is where You are  
Where You are, Lord, I am free  
Holiness is Christ in me