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**Sunday 20 March 2022 to Sunday 27 March 2022**

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Sunday 20 March 2022

# Repent

by Mark Schubert

**Do you think that these … were worse sinners? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish (Luke 13 2,5).**

Read Luke 13:1–9

When bad things happen to someone, is God punishing them for their sins?

Some people told Jesus about the Galileans killed by Pilate when sacrificing to God. Jesus responded to their unasked question, ‘Do you think that these… were worse sinners? … No …’ (Luke 13:2,3a).

No, they were not worse sinners than anyone else - the same for those killed by the collapse of a tower. No, they were not more guilty than others.

All of us are sinners. None worse than any other.

We can all say with Paul, ‘the good that I want to do I can’t, instead I do the evil I don’t want to do’ (Romans 7:19).

All are sinners inside – some can hide it better than others, but we are all turned in on ourselves, egocentric, hard-hearted – building walls, cutting ourselves off from each other by our thoughts and actions, working towards the final separation, death. ‘The wages of sin is death’ (Romans 6:23).

‘But unless you repent, you too will all perish’ (Luke 13:5).

To repent is to be sorry, to admit your selfishness and inability to change. Jesus started his mission with, ‘Repent and believe the good news!’ (Mark 1:15). Confess your sinfulness, and turn to the good news that you have been forgiven.

Jesus came to die for you – to take your death, to forgive you. And he rose again to live in you. He gives his goodness, holiness and love for all helpless, hopeless sinners.

This is the time of grace, the time to decide –stay in the power of sin and perish, or receive what Jesus has done for you, so his Spirit can produce good fruit in you.

**Lord, we admit that we sin – we hurt others, ourselves, and you. Have mercy on us, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.**

Monday 21 March 2022

# Repentance leads to …

by Mark Schubert

**Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from their evil ways. Then I will relent and not inflict on them the disaster I was planning (Jeremiah 26:3).**

Read Jeremiah 26:1–16,24

Jeremiah had a tough job. He was a prophet, so he was to speak for God and say his word.

He had to proclaim the truth – that the king and people of Judah had spurned God’s love. They had worshipped other gods and relied on Egypt to defend them. They were like a wife, unfaithful to her husband, chasing after other lovers.

The message was that because of this, God was planning to destroy them, their city, and the temple. Perhaps this judgement would cause them to repent, and God, always willing to forgive and give a new start, would not bring on them the disaster they deserved.

This was not a popular message that Jeremiah spoke – so they seized him and said, ‘You must die!’ (verse 8).

Jeremiah protested his innocence, ‘in truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing’ (verse 15). The people were convinced by him, and he was reprieved.

This reminds us of Jesus. He was the prophet predicted by Moses, who not only spoke God’s word but was the Word himself. He came to his own people, but they rejected him, just like they had Jeremiah. He was the bridegroom, loving, giving himself to them, but the religious leaders trusted rules and their own obedience.

Jesus talked of God’s judgement on those who rejected him and his love for them, always looking for repentance and trust in him. Again, not a popular message to those sure of their own goodness, so Jesus was seized and condemned to die. His defence was that he spoke only the truth.

But the people were led by their religious leaders, and the innocent Son of God died an agonising death.

This was not just the death of a prophet ­– a person speaking for God – but was God himself dying, taking our rejection, unfaithfulness, sin and suffering the disaster and destruction we deserve so that we can become the holy, innocent children of God.

**Thank you, God, that through Jesus’ death, you forgive and accept us. Amen.**

Tuesday 22 March 2022

# A different response

by Mark Schubert

**When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened (Jonah 3:10).**

Read Jonah 3:1–10

What a contrast between this story of Jonah and the previous story of Jeremiah!

They were both prophets, given God’s word to proclaim: ‘Listen, or be destroyed’.

Jeremiah obeyed; he preached, pleaded and persuaded for years. Jonah headed in the opposite direction. But God changed Jonah’s mind with the help of a big fish, and then Jonah preached the single statement of doom for one day.

Jeremiah spoke to God’s own people, but they rejected him and threatened his life. Jonah talked to the heathen Ninevites, and they all repented. Even the king – a cruel, brutal man – rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust (verse 6).

The king sent out a proclamation, ‘Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence’ (verse 8). They were a people who didn’t know the Lord! But Jonah did. Afterwards, he complained angrily, ‘That is why I ran away! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people’ (Jonah 4:2).

Jonah didn’t say any of this to Nineveh! The king of Nineveh believed in the threatened destruction, and he threw himself and his people on the possible mercy of this God of justice, ‘Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish’ (verse 9).

God did relent, and they didn’t perish.

God is compassionate, and he loves all people. He doesn’t want to destroy but to forgive. He is even willing to accept those who come in fear of his just punishment – as long as they come! Then they can learn of his love and his life-giving sacrifice for them, freeing them to be his loved children.

**Thank you, Lord, that you seek every lost person so you can bring them home and rejoice with heaven over each sinner who repents. Amen.**

Wednesday 23 March 2022

# Success?

by Mark Schubert

**Whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:27,28).**

Read Matthew 20:20–28

Have you heard the story of the preacher who said, ‘Just believe; then your wife will be beautiful, your children obedient, your business will flourish, and you will be rich and powerful’?

That is not what Jesus promised. He was not the Messiah who brought power, triumph, success and riches to Israel – or to us.

Speaking for the disciples, Peter recognised Jesus, ‘You are the Messiah’ (Mark 8:29). Peter thought Jesus would be a powerful conquering king, like David.

‘He (Jesus) then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected … and that he must be killed and after three days rise again’ (Mark 8:29,31).

Predictably, this did not go over well with Peter.

Then Jesus said, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’ (Mark 8:34). This also was not popular.

We like the good things that Jesus gives us through his suffering and death, the forgiveness, adoption, righteousness, freedom … but we are not so keen on following his example of suffering and service.

At his last meal with his disciples, Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So he took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:3–5).

We come from our Father in baptism as his children. We are going to God to reign with Jesus – so we, too, can become servants to others, humbly serving whomever and whenever we can. With joy, we follow our Servant King.

**You discarded your power to humbly serve us in love. Help us joyfully and humbly love and serve you and others. Amen.**

Thursday 24 March 2022

# Greed and God

by Mark Schubert

**No immoral, impure or greedy person – such a person is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Ephesians 5:5).**

Read Ephesians 5:1–7

Greed – the never satisfied desire for more, in particular, more money or things.

Jesus told his disciples not to store up things – treasures – here on earth, where they are destroyed by moth or rust. He said, ‘God your Father knows what you need, even the basics of food, drink, and clothing, and he will provide. You cannot serve God and money – choose which to depend on’ (Matthew 6:24–34).

Greed is idolatry, putting trust in wealth. And a greedy person can’t love others.

‘You will always have the poor among you,’ Jesus said, ‘and you can help them whenever you want to’ (Mark 14:7). The early church did. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need (Acts 2:45).

How can we help the needy? Paul said, ‘use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need’ (Ephesians 4:8).

And Paul explained how this works, ‘Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it’ (2 Corinthians 8:12–14).

Many are poorer than us: hungry, homeless, desperate. War-torn areas, violent, abusive families, and coercive and destructive relationships. Many people are suffering physically and mentally. These people need our money, help and support.

Paul said, ‘You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty he could make you rich’ (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Jesus gives us the real riches of his forgiveness, freedom, new life and love. He comes to us through his word, baptism and his body and blood. And, quite surprisingly, also through the hungry, thirsty, naked, strangers, sick and prisoners we care for. Through giving to these people, we serve him (Matthew 25:31-46).

**We thank you, Lord, for the material riches you have given us. Help us not cling to them or serve them but share them generously with those in need. Amen.**

Friday 25 March 2022

# Be holy

by Mark Schubert

**But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’ (1 Peter 1:15,16).**

Read 1 Peter 1:13–21

Be holy! That’s a tough order!

Or is it? Perhaps it’s not an order at all, but a gift! Peter said, ‘You were cleansed from your sins’ (1 Peter 1:22), ‘You are his holy priests’ (1 Peter 2:5), ‘a holy nation’ (1 Peter 2:9).

He explained how this gift was given: ‘You were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world’ (1 Peter 1:19,20).

We, too, were chosen then – to be holy.

‘Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This was his pleasure and purpose (Ephesians 1:4,5).

So you are holy. You are obedient children (1 Peter 1:14), with the same DNA as our brother Jesus, and like him, we are foreigners here (1 Peter 1:17) who do not fit into this world of selfishness and sin. This world is not your home, so you ‘do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance’ (1 Peter 1:14).

But, as well as being holy, you are also 100% sinners, who with Paul, can say, ‘I want to do what is right, but I can’t … I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway’ (Romans 7:18,19).

We do not yet see our holiness but hold it by faith and hope. Peter said, ‘with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming’ (1 Peter 1:13).

And again, ‘Through him [Christ] you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God’ (1 Peter 1:21).

Where the Holy Spirit gives faith and hope, he also gives love (1 Corinthians 13:13). ‘Now that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart’ (1 Peter 1:22).

**Thank you that you have given us your holiness. Help us to believe that and live it in love. Amen.**

Saturday 26 March 2022

# Repentance and forgiveness

by Mark Schubert

**I said to myself, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’. And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone (Psalm 32:5b).**

Read Psalm 32

‘How can you live with yourself?’

We say this to someone who has deliberately, callously or badly hurt another person. A murderer, a rapist, a serious criminal.

King David had sex with Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife. She became pregnant, so David had Uriah killed in battle. David was an adulterer and a murderer.

How did David live with himself? He said, ‘When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long’ (verse 3). But then David repented. He said, ‘I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt’ (verse 5). Like the king of Nineveh, David was honest with God and himself. He gave no excuses, no justification – he came as a helpless, hopeless sinner.

David reported, ‘And you forgave me!’ (verse 5). Entirely from God’s mercy, compassion and love! No wonder he was overcome with gratitude and joy. ‘O what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!’ (verse 1).

I have not murdered, but Jesus said if I am angry with someone, call someone an idiot or curse someone, I am the same as a murderer. Similarly, I have not committed adultery, but if I look at a woman with lust, I am guilty (Matthew 5:22,28). When I look in my heart with God’s eyes, I am condemned by many sins.

I, like David, come to God with no excuses or justification, but as a helpless, hopeless sinner. I confess my sin.

And God forgives me! I know this because his Son Jesus Christ died for me, and he feeds me with his body, given for us, and his blood shed for the forgiveness of sin.

How do I live with myself? Like David, I rejoice with the freedom that God’s forgiveness brings. Since I am one ‘whose sin is put out of sight’ (verse 1) and ‘whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt’ (verse 2), his words, ‘Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!’ (verse 11), also mean me!

**I confess that I have hurt others and you. Give me again the joy of your salvation. Amen.**

Sunday 27 March 2022

# Nearer to God

by Dianne Eckermann

**Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them’ (Luke 15:1,2).**

Read Luke 15:1–3,11b–32

Luke chapter 15 begins with outsiders – that is, the tax collectors and sinners of his community – drawing near to him.

Jesus is not demanding they come to him, nor is he ordering them to follow. They are, apparently of their own accord, drawing near to him. There is something in his demeanour, in his teaching and in his acceptance of this group of tax collectors and sinners that encourages them to want to know him.

At the same time, others see what is happening. The Pharisees also spend a lot of time around Jesus. But their motives are not the same as the sinners who felt drawn to him. They are there to judge, catch him out, find reasons to criticise and ultimately condemn him. They believe they have a relationship with God, a rather exclusive relationship as it definitely excludes the group of sinners who come to Jesus to know more.

There could not be two more contrasting groups of people gathering around Jesus with two very contrasting motives. If we put ourselves into this picture, we may find it difficult to see where we fit. We probably don’t want to identify with the self-righteous Pharisees, nor do we want to be defined by our sin. If we could truly see ourselves, we may realise we are both self-righteous and sinful.

Our relationship with God is not determined by our best behaviour, by being a nice person or by regularly attending church each Sunday. Our relationship with God is also not defined by our worst behaviour, the times we have not been at all nice to others or when we have neglected God. It has already been determined by the immeasurable love of God, who comes to us in all our imperfections, including those we are not even aware of. It has already been determined by a loving God who draws us near, even though we keep losing our way.

Luke chapter 15 ends with the parable of the prodigal son and the words, ‘he was lost, and is found’. The prodigal son is all of us – we are simultaneously lost and found because no matter who we are or what we have done, God waits with love, acceptance, mercy and grace.

**We pray: Heavenly Father, you know who we are, and you accept us for who we are. We ask you to reach out to us with your love and acceptance, drawing us nearer to you. In the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.**